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THE VITA NUOVA OF DANTE

“ Es gilt nur ein Glück auf der Erde, das Glück der Liebe,
und wer das versäumt, alles versäumt.”—FICHTE.

“ My love involves the love before ;
My love is vaster passion now ;
Though mixed with God and Nature thou,
I seem to love thee more and more.

“ Far off thou art, yet ever nigh ;
I have thee still, and I rejoice ;
I prosper, circled by thy voice,
I shall not lose thee, though I die.”

—TENNYSON, *In Memoriam*.





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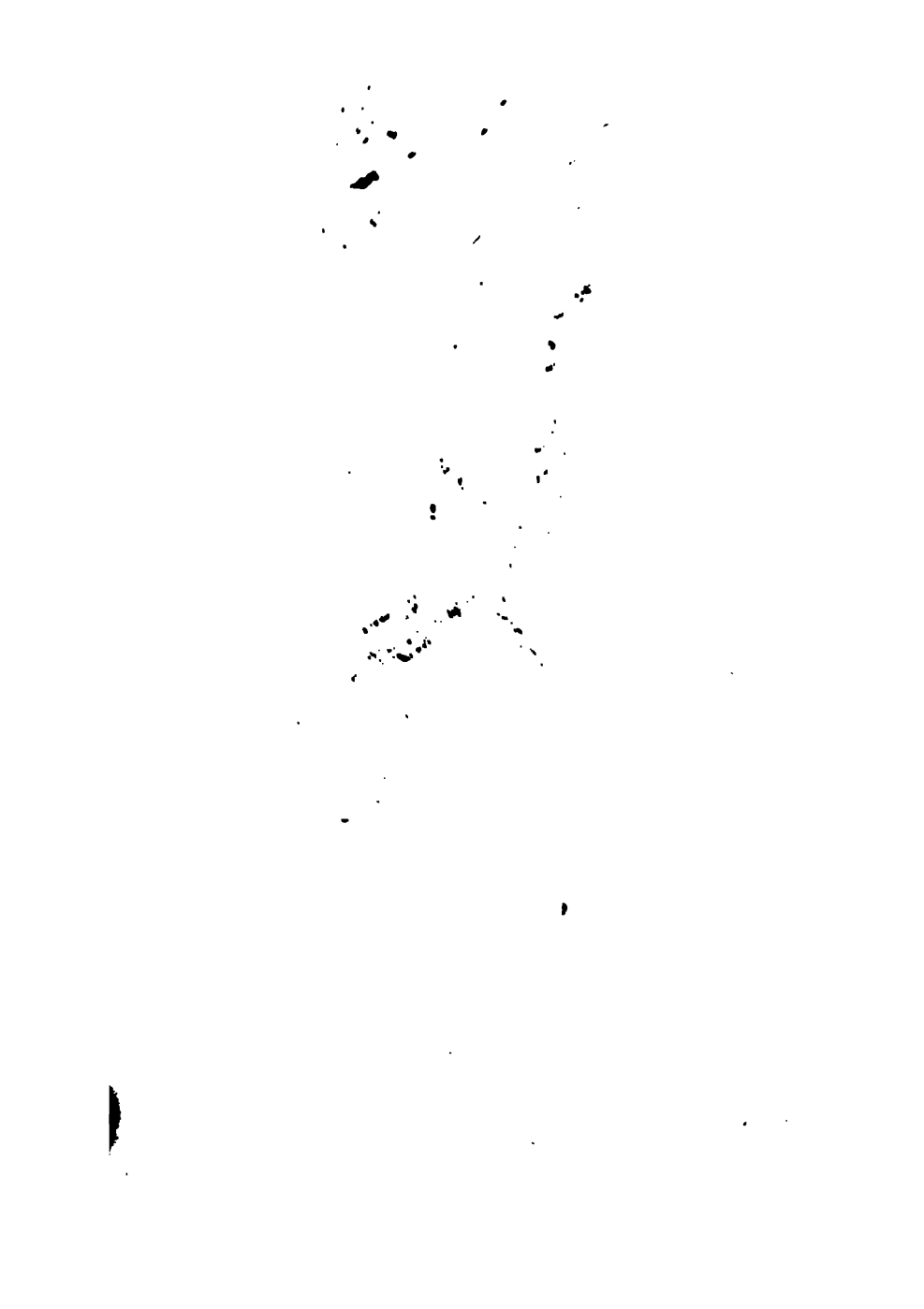
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THE VITA NUOVA OF DANTE

TRANSLATED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES

BY

THEODORE MARTIN

SECOND EDITION



WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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238: g. 54.

TO MY WIFE.

1861.



BELoved, whose life is with mine own
entwined,
In whom, while yet thou wert my
dream, I viewed,
Warm with the life of breathing womanhood,
What Shakespeare's visionary eye divined;
Pure Imogen, high-hearted Rosalind,
Kindling with sunshine all the dusk greenwood;
Or, changing with the poet's changing mood,
Juliet, and Constance of the queenly mind;
I give this book to thee, whose daily life
With that full pulse of noblest feeling glows,
Which lent its spell to thy so potent art;
To thee, whose every act, my own true wife,
The grace serene and heavenward spirit shows,
That rooted Beatrice in Dante's heart.



INTRODUCTION.

THERE is not in literature a more remarkable contribution to the personal history of a great man than the 'Vita Nuova' of Dante. It is a chronicle equally minute in analysis, and admirable in expression, of emotions the most profound; a record of real life to which there is nothing superior in romance. It traces the master passion of the poet's life from its dawn through its first purifying phases of reverence and affliction; and not only is his heart laid bare before us, but we are made, as it were, to see the very processes by which his poetical genius wrought. Every incident, every emotion, out of which his verses grew, is there, side by side with the verses themselves,—and thus we are enabled to trace the workings of his

shaping spirit of imagination, lifting the real into the ideal, or rather pouring its own golden light around a beautiful reality. Beatrice, with her sweet smile, her voice rich with the music of a noble heart, her infinite grace which made her supreme among the graceful, comes before us as vividly as Imogen or Desdemona ; and with a deeper interest, for we know that she was no mere being shaped out of the poet's brain, but a perfect woman, whose influence refined and ennobled the poet's heart, filling it with those yearnings after that ideal of beauty and goodness, which it is the peculiar office of woman to inspire : and kindling and sustaining within him that ambition to consecrate his genius to her honour, which has linked their names in a splendid immortality. His dream, his guiding star, while she lived, Beatrice became his angel, his monitress, his aspiration, when dead. Her image cheered and sustained him through exile, and poverty, and desolation. Through her he was incited to rise above the common herd.* She it was who opened that perennial fount of love which gushed

* "*Beatrice, lode di Dio vera,
Chè non soccorre quei, che l' amò tanto,
Ch' uscì per te della volgare schiera.*"

—Inf. ii. 103.

" Oh, Beatrice ! true praise of Deity,
Wherefore not succour him who loved thee so,
That from the vulgar throng he passed through thee ?"

for ever within his heart, and gave inspiration to his pen, so that he wrote of himself:—

*“ Io mi son un, che quando
Amore spira, noto, ed a quel modo
Ch’ ei detta dentro, vo significando.”*

—Purg. xxiv. 52.

“ A man am I who write,
When with his kindling breath Love stirs my soul,
And, as he prompts, so I my songs indite.”

To her he dedicated his inner soul, and to her ascribed all that was most worthy in its achievements. How all this came to be, the ‘Vita Nuova’ tells us. Its very name shows the importance which Dante attached to the story it contains, and the worshipper of his genius will find no fitter clue to his personal character than it affords.

There is happily no need, at this time of day, to dwell upon the theory of Biscioni and others, that no such person as Beatrice ever existed; that she was merely an allegorical phantom of the poet’s fancy, a fiction as purely ideal as Ariel or Urania. That any one, after reading the ‘Vita Nuova,’ should maintain such a proposition would be incredible, if any extravagance in commentators could be so. If ever true passion spoke, it speaks there; if ever the very life-glow of the heart throbbed in song, it throbs in the tenderness and pathos of its exquisite

verse, and scarcely less exquisite prose. This book, unsupported by any collateral evidence, would by itself suffice to establish beyond a doubt, that Beatrice was not of "such stuff as dreams are made of," but moulded of that noble humanity wherewith Heaven blesses, not unfrequently, our common earth. But we know from other sources also, that the Beatrice of the 'Vita Nuova' and of the 'Divina Commedia' had her type in the Bice who played round the knees of old Folco Portinari, and smiled her own gentleness and purity into the heart of Dante. The Beatrice of the "Paradiso" is the Beatrice whom men turned round and crowded to gaze at, as she glided past them on the streets of Florence,—the Beatrice who for that mortal has put on immortality, and is now transfigured into a semblance glorified indeed, yet scarcely more pure and saintly than that which she wore on earth.

Why should we be slow to acknowledge that the poet actually saw and did not greatly exaggerate the spiritual beauty of this fair Tuscan girl? We all feel the force of the picture, and most of us refer it to some one whom our eyes have seen, when we read in Wordsworth of—

" The perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort, and command,

And yet a spirit still, and bright
With something of an angel light."

The same recognition of spiritual beauty, the same reverent faith in womanhood, which produced these lines, inspired the heart and pen of Dante, when he penned the early sonnets of the 'Vita Nuova,' with a trembling hope that the young Bice's eyes might rest upon them in no unloving mood, and afterwards, when her spirit hovered over him, as with a more exalted fervour he chanted the inspired strains of his great poem.

Of this beautiful love-story we know, unhappily, only too little. Many of the circumstances connected with it are wrapped in an obscurity which we long in vain to penetrate. Boccaccio, writing some fifty years after Dante's death, tells us little beyond what Dante himself indicates in the 'Vita Nuova.' "It was the custom," he writes, in his garrulous way, "in our city for both men and women, when the pleasant time of spring came round, to form social gatherings in their own quarters of the city, for the purposes of merry-making. In this way Folco Portinari, a citizen of mark, had amongst others collected his neighbours at his house upon the first of May, for pastime and rejoicing. Among these was the afore-named Alighieri, and with him—it being common for little

children to accompany their parents, especially at merry-makings—came our Dante, then scarce nine years old, who, with the other children of his own age that were in the house, engaged in the sports appropriate to their years. Among these others was a little daughter of the aforesaid Folco, called Bice, about eight years old, very winning, graceful, and attractive in her ways, in aspect beautiful, and with an earnestness and gravity in her speech beyond her years. This child turned her gaze from time to time upon Dante with so much tenderness as filled the boy brimful with delight, and he took her image so deeply into his mind, that no subsequent pleasure could ever afterwards extinguish or expel it. Not to dwell more upon these passages of childhood, suffice it to say, that this love—not only continuing, but increasing day by day,—having no other or greater desire or consolation than to look upon her—became to him, in his more advanced age, the frequent and woeful cause of the most burning sighs, and of many bitter tears, as he has shown in a portion of his ‘*Vita Nuova*.’”

The incidents recorded in the ‘*Vita Nuova*’ are few and meagre. They may be summed up in a sentence or two. Dante, a boy of nine, meets Beatrice, a girl of eight, very much as Boccaccio mentions. He falls in love with her then at once

and for ever. They do not meet, so as to interchange greetings, until nine years afterwards, although Dante, in the interval, seized every opportunity of seeing and watching the growing girl. This second meeting, and the words which fell from her on the occasion, confirm his passion, which finds its natural vent in poetry. No direct intimation of his love is, however, made by the poet to Beatrice; and in order to mislead the curious, who saw from his appearance and demeanour that the fever-fit of love was upon him, he resorted to the device, then not an uncommon one, of feigning to be the admirer *par amours* of two other ladies in succession.

Beatrice, however, he gives us to understand, had reason to know the true state of the case; but he dissembles only too well, for his attentions to one of the ladies for whom he feigned affection become a topic of scandal. Beatrice, incensed, refuses him her salutation; or, in other words, declines further acquaintance with him. The poet is in despair. Her indignation lasts apparently for a considerable time, and during this period, it may with great probability be inferred, she married, although Dante is silent throughout on this subject. How a reconciliation takes place we are not told; but we are left to infer that they were reconciled,

from the circumstance, incidentally noticed, of Dante's being subsequently a visitor at her father's house, and on terms of the closest intimacy with her brother at the time of her death, and also from the more serene tenor of the poems of which she is the subject. Her father's death (December 1289), an event which seems to have plunged her into the deepest grief, affords an opportunity to Dante for expressing a sympathy which appears to have been not unwelcome to her. Her own death follows (June 9, 1290) soon afterwards, and Dante is beginning, after a time, to recover from the shock of this bereavement, when the interest in his grief shown by some Florentine lady wins upon him insensibly, till, finding himself fascinated by her influence, he resolves to discard her from his thoughts, and never more to swerve from his allegiance to Beatrice, the one sole mistress of his heart. This is a portion of his story so painfully true to the weakness of human nature, and so unlike what any man, not of the noblest order, would chronicle of himself, that it alone would be sufficient to mark the 'Vita Nuova' as a record of facts. After this, the poet records that there appeared to him a wonderful vision, which, there can be no doubt, was that which afterwards took shape in the 'Divina Commedia,' in which he "saw things that made

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him determine to write no more of this dear saint, until he should be able to write of her more worthily; and, of a surety," he adds, "she knows that I study to attain unto this with all my powers. So, if it shall please Him, by Whom all things live, to spare my life for some years longer, I hope to say that of her, which never yet hath been said of any lady; and then may it please Him, Who is the Father of all good, to suffer my soul to see the glory of its mistress—that is, of this sainted Beatrice; who now, abiding in glory, looketh upon the face of Him, *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus.*"

Writing as he did, not to give the story of this part of his career in detail, but merely to indicate the origin and development of the master feeling of his life, Dante had no occasion to record particulars as to which we now most naturally desire some explanation. Why, for example, having met, in the first instance, as they did, and being near neighbours,* did no communication of any kind pass between Dante and Beatrice for the next nine years? Was it that in these stormy times some sudden alien-

* "The Alighieri and the Portinari lived not more than fifty yards apart; the latter having their apartments where is now the Palazzo Ricciardi, formerly that of the Dukes Salviati, in the street of the Corso, near the Canto de' Pazzi, and the former living on the Piazza di S. Martino,

ation between their parents had kept them apart? But for the existence of some such reason it is scarcely credible that Dante should not, in so long an interval, have found an opportunity of directly declaring his attachment. For it is hard to imagine him as a mere love-sick dreamer, pining, like Viola, with an untold passion. All we know of him forbids this conclusion. In position, education, and appearance, he was "a man worth any woman." Giotto's portrait of him, at the age of thirty, which was discovered in the Bargello of Florence in 1840, enables us to picture for ourselves the youthful Dante as Beatrice must have seen him. The face is full of intellect and manly beauty, but with the sensitive, self-enwapt, and abstracted air, which tells of a constant unrest and struggle after more than is to be found amid the limitations of earthly life; a face in which tenderness and rigour are strangely blended, the mirror of a nature at once singularly sympathetic and singularly self-centred. But that face, before the records had been stamped upon it of his grief for the loss of Beatrice, must have been eminently engaging. Intellect, feeling, just at the corner of the street leading to St Margaret's Church; and their apartments at the back looked upon the Piazza de' Donati, otherwise called della Rena."—*Note by FRATICELLI, Opere Minore di Dante*. Edit. 1857, vol. ii. p. 6.

character, were all there, and, more than all these, the suggestion that behind it was something "that never can be wholly known," which always has been, and always will be, especially attractive to the other sex. Dante's accomplishments, moreover, were great and various. "The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's eye, pen, sword," were all his. He had spirit, courage, and the love of action, which enabled him to hold his ground among his compeers, and to hold it with distinction. With all these qualities and circumstances in his favour, and no positive dislike on the part of the lady to counteract them (for this much, at least, is certain), it seems strange that his love should not have found its issue in marriage ; for Dante's love, in its origin and early stages, was manifestly no mere Platonism. It was the united devotion of heart, soul, and senses concentrated on one object, and ambitious of obtaining it for their own. It is impossible to read his poems of this period without coming to this conclusion. Tremblingly and reverently, no doubt, he loved Beatrice from first to last, as a noble nature always will love the woman who is worthy of its regard. But he loved her as a man loves, and with the passion that naturally perseveres to the possession of its mistress.

Why his love was unsuccessful is a mystery on

which Dante himself throws no light, and as to which no satisfactory explanation has hitherto been suggested. A straitened fortune on his side has most commonly been supposed to have been the cause. Yet this conjecture is not satisfactory, for Dante married, not many years after Beatrice's death, a lady in all respects her equal in rank and fortune. Can it have been, that, in the interval of nine years already referred to, when Dante had no opportunity of personal intercourse with Beatrice, or during the subsequent period of her displeasure with him, her hand had been, perhaps lightly, or to please her parents, pledged to Messer Simone dei Bardi, in ignorance of the deep and noble passion which she had inspired in the young poet's heart? This, however, is the merest conjecture, for even the date of Beatrice's marriage is unknown, our only information that she was married being derived from the incidental mention of the fact in her father's will,* dated the fifteenth of January 1287, at which date she was twenty-one years old. That she knew of Dante's love was certain; for Dante expressly indicates this in the 'Vita Nuova.'†

* *Item Domina Bici filie suæ et uxori Domini Simonis de Bardis reliquit libr. 50 ad floren.*

† "Wherefore, although of a truth thy secret is through

But did she know of it before her marriage? And did she, either then or afterwards, give it her countenance and approval, or return it in any, and in what degree? These are questions which naturally suggest themselves; but the materials for a reply are most scanty and unsatisfactory. That Beatrice was, at an early period, not indifferent to Dante, may, we think, be fairly argued from the circumstance mentioned in the 'Vita Nuova' (p. 16, *infra*), that she was so indignant at his having, however innocently, compromised the name of one of the ladies to whom he feigned attachment as a screen to his love for herself, that she passed him for a time without notice. Would she have felt so strongly had Dante been to her no more than any other Florentine gallant? We think not; and are inclined to hold that Beatrice believed for the time that, in the dangerous game he was playing, Dante's assumed love had become a real passion, and that she resented his apostasy accordingly. How long the estrangement lasted to which this incident gave rise does not appear. The 'Vita Nuova' gives no clue; and the next event in the progress of his love-story, which it records, is his being unexpectedly thrown into the society of Beatrice at a marriage usage in some measure known to her."—'Vita Nuova,' p. 19, *infra*.

riage-party, where he was so overcome with emotion as to provoke the merriment of the ladies present, in which Beatrice, to his infinite discomfiture, joined. By this time, it is certain, she was married, as only married women were, by the custom of Florence, present at meetings of this description; and it seems not unreasonable to conclude, from Dante's extreme suffering and discomposure on the occasion, that this was their first meeting after her marriage. Unquestionably it startles and jars us to find Beatrice taking part with her friends in their raillery of Dante. But there may have been causes for this—the necessity, for example, of not seeming to encourage or sympathise with her lover—which it is impossible to estimate, but for which, in justice to her, allowance must be made, even as we see that Dante made it. His faith in her “courtesy and gentle heart” was in no degree shaken by it. His appeal to her in the sonnet which he wrote upon the occasion (p. 25, *infra*), is full of pathos, and could not fail to move Beatrice deeply. How, indeed, could a woman, such as he portrays her, have been insensible to the profound tenderness and passion, penetrating through the most reverent devotion, which distinguishes this and those other sonnets of the ‘Vita Nuova,’ which clearly were written, not merely for the re-

lief of the poet's heart, but for his mistress to see? Sooner or later, before Beatrice died, we cannot doubt that there came a day when words passed between them which helped to reconcile Dante to the doom that severed her from his side during her all too brief sojourn on earth,—when the pent-up heart of the poet swept down the barriers within which it had so long struggled, and he

“ Caught up the whole of love, and uttered it,
Then bade adieu for ever,”

if not to her, yet to all those words which it was no longer meet should be spoken to another's wife.

Thenceforth the mind of Dante became more calm, and he could write such sonnets as the “ *Amore e cor gentil sono una cosa* ” (p. 37, *infra*), and the “ *Negli occhi porta la mia donna amore* ” (p. 38, *infra*), which seem to spring from the depths of a soul from which the turmoil and tumult of passion and disappointment have, in a great measure, passed away.

It is plain that, at the time these sonnets were written, Dante stood on a footing of intimate friendship with Beatrice's family. His love for her could have been no secret to them. Indeed, after the incident at the marriage-party, already alluded to,

it must have been well known through the whole circle of his friends. Her husband, Messer Simone dei Bardi, himself must have known it, for what was no secret to Dante's friends could have been no secret to him. It is not even difficult to suppose that he entertained Dante as a friend. Jealousy in such a case was out of the question. The love of Dante was of an order too pure and noble to occasion distrust, even if the purity of Beatrice had not placed her above suspicion. It is true that we have no direct information on this point; but we see that, when old Folco Portinari died, Dante was one of the intimate friends who paid the customary visit of condolence to the family ('Vita Nuova,' p. 40, *infra*); and when, soon afterwards, Beatrice herself died, Dante speaks of her brother as one "who, according to the degrees of friendship, was his friend next in order after his first" (p. 65, *infra*). Is there not, too, an indication peculiarly touching of the feeling with which this brother regarded Dante's devotion to his sister, in the request that he would write something for him "on a lady who was but lately dead," when he must have known well that there was only one such theme on which Dante could write, but that, in the prostration of his grief, the execution of such a task might bring some measure of healing to the poet in his desolation?

But how did Beatrice requite all this devotion, the deepest and tenderest of which any written record remains? As to this, Dante gives no direct indication. If we are to read some of his minor poems, not included in the 'Vita Nuova,' but written obviously during the period to which it refers, and which will be found translated in the notes at the end of this volume, Dante seems to have thought that she had given, upon occasion, some encouragement to his passion. But passion is notoriously prone to self-deception on such points. He is a modest lover, indeed, who has not at times, Malvolio-like, converted the most innocent looks and gestures into tokens of favour. Even so may Dante have deceived himself; and certainly there is no intimation in the 'Vita Nuova,' which, being written some time after Beatrice's death, when "grief was calm and hope was dead," might be looked to as containing the truth of the matter, that Beatrice at any time returned his affection. At the same time, it is contrary to human nature that a love unfed by any tokens of favour should retain all its original force; and, without wrong either to Beatrice or Dante, we may conclude that an understanding was come to between them, which in some measure soothed his heart, if it did not satisfy it, by leading him to believe that he held no

unhonoured niche in "that temple, her fair mind." This inference is strengthened by the relation to the poet which she occupies in the '*Divina Commedia*,' as expressed more particularly in certain passages of the "*Purgatorio*," which we shall hereafter have occasion to cite, where they appear to be bound together by an affection which was not wholly without recognition, ere Beatrice

"Had gone to yonder heaven,
To realms where angels are, and dwell in peace."

On whatever footing they stood towards each other, we may at least be sure of this, that their intercourse was pure and frank and noble. Beatrice's husband, probably, and certainly her brother, were alive when the '*Vita Nuova*' was written and published; and had the footing on which the poet stood with the lady not been clear and unquestionable, he could not have spoken so freely and fervently of his devotion as he has there done.

Here, too, it should be remembered that Dante loved Beatrice from her girlhood. His passion was not kindled, like Petrarch's, by another's wife. There was no barrier to its growth in either duty or honour. It had become the pervading principle of his life, when he beheld her consigned to the bosom of another. What room is there for censure here?

We keep no terms with such loves as those of Petrarch. All other considerations apart, they are unmanly—as what can be more unmanly than to surround a woman with attentions, and besiege her with addresses, which, if they do not endanger virtue, may leave behind them wounds which a lifetime will scarcely suffice to heal? Let all such passions be left to the ridicule of women and the scorn of men. They are not love in the sense in which alone it should be known in the Christian world. Such love is wise, thoughtful, self-sacrificing, pure. It

“Hath its seat
In reason, and is judicious.”

It nurses no unlawful aims, no impossible desires; it palters not with the claims of others, neither does it equivocate with right and wrong. Its essential condition is propriety and fitness. It scorns to plead the splendour of its fancies in mitigation of the aberrations of its judgment, to excuse its impertinence by its poetry, or to substitute a sonnet for an infraction of the Decalogue. Far different from such selfish wilfulness was Dante's love. “In yielding to its sway,” so he writes in the ‘*Vita Nuova*,’ “I carried with me the full sanction of reason, in all those matters wherein it is of import-

ance to listen to his counsel." When Beatrice married, Dante could not subdue his love—he could not make it as though it had never been. For many a day its shadow must often have crossed him much too sadly for his peace. Nor was it necessary that he should forget a thing so noble. But he did what was better, yet what only a great and manly nature could have done,—he triumphed over the pain. He uttered no complaint—his regrets were buried within his own heart. But the faith, the aspirations with which she had inspired him, were still his. Of these Messer Simone dei Bardi could not deprive him. With these he dwelt, to these he clung, in these he found his solace. The real was transformed into the ideal, desire was elevated into idolatry. Anon came Death, a mightier lord, and took her from his eyes; but her spirit left its radiance with him, and spoke to him through all his tempest-shaken soul in every beautiful and good and noble thought.

There are not wanting critics who regard the relation of Dante to Beatrice in a very different light. Thus, for example, Leigh Hunt, in the "Essay on the Life and Genius of Dante," in his very pleasant 'Tales from the Italian Poets,' treats this topic with a levity and want of sympathy which, in one usually so generous, is the more remarkable. Mr

Hunt takes credit to himself for stating what he calls "the probable truth of the matter," thus :—

"The natural tendencies of a poetical temperament (oftener evinced in a like manner than the world in general suppose) not only made the boy-poet fall in love, but, in the truly Elysian state of the heart at that innocent and adoring time of life, made him fancy he had discovered a goddess in the object of his love ; and strength of purpose, as well as of imagination, made him grow up in the fancy. He disclosed himself, as time advanced, only by his manner ; received complacent recognitions in company from the young lady ; offended her by seeming to devote himself to another ; rendered himself the sport of her and her young friends by his adoring timidity—see the fifth and sixth sonnets in the 'Vita Nuova,'—in short, constituted her a paragon of perfection, and enabled her, by so doing, to show that she was none.

"Now, it is to be admitted that a young lady, if she is not very wise, may laugh at her lover with her companions, and yet return his love, after her fashion ; but the fair Portinari laughs and marries another. Some less melancholy face, some more intelligible courtship triumphed over the questionable flattery of the poet's gratuitous worship, and the idol of Dante Alighieri became the wife of

Messer Simone dei Bardi. It transpired from a clause in her father's will ; and yet so bent are the biographers on leaving a romantic doubt in one's mind, whether Beatrice may not have returned his passion, that not only do all of them (so far as I have observed) agree in taking no notice of these sonnets, but the author of the treatise entitled 'Dante and the Catholic Philosophy of the Thirteenth Century,' 'in spite,' as a critic says, 'of the *Beatrice, his daughter, wife of Messer Simone dei Bardi*, of the paternal will,' describes her as 'dying in all the lustre of virginity.' The assumption appears to be thus gloriously stated, as a counterpart to the notoriety of its untruth. It must be acknowledged that Dante himself gave the cue to it by more than silence ; for he not only vaunts her acquaintance in the next world, but assumes that she returns his love in that region, as if no such person as her husband could have existed, or as if he himself had not been married also."

This is smart writing ; but it neither states the question fairly, nor shows an intelligent appreciation of the passion with which it pretends to deal. Why should Dante be made responsible for the absurdities of his biographers and commentators ? What they may have said respecting Beatrice, or her death in the "*éclatasse de la virginité*," is beside

the question. Dante did not mention her marriage; but the reason of this very plainly is that he had no occasion to do so. In composing the 'Vita Nuova' he was chronicling the origin and permanent progression of his love,—"*fervida e passionata*"—up to the time of her death, just as subsequently he portrayed it in its calmer and more manly aspect—"temperata e virile"—in his 'Convito,' and as later still he showed it, sublimated into spirituality, in his 'Divina Commedia.' The mention of her marriage would have been out of place in a purely psychological treatise like this. The agonies which that event brought with it were between himself and Heaven. That they must have been fearful might be divined, even without the well-known record of his having fallen ill upon the occasion. But Dante was neither a Petrarch nor a Rousseau, to lay bare such wounds as these; and, moreover, it was not of these, which were evanescent, and of the hour, that he had it in view to write, but of the spiritual influence of his attachment, which was permanent and immortal. It was, therefore, as we conceive, neither coxcombry, nor a wish to mislead, that dictated Dante's silence on this point. The beauty of this love-story needs no adventitious aids, whether of invention or concealment. In Dante's hands it is simple, earnest, and

truth; nor will the criticism either seek in it what it does not profess to give, or make it answerable for the delinquencies of foolish commentators.

We do not know where Mr Hunt found his warrant for saying that the boy-poet fancied he had discovered a goddess in the object of his love. There never, perhaps, was so much devotion with so little rhapsody as in the love-poetry of Dante. Mystical and obscure he often is. The modes of thought in which he had been trained made him so; but he worships no phantoms. His Beatrice is pure flesh and blood—beautiful, yet substantial—a woman

“ Not too bright and good
For human nature’s daily food.”

In fact, there is perhaps no love-poetry in the world which deals less in the attributes of celestial charms than the love-sonnets of Dante. He does not leave the earth to seek for images of beauty to express her perfections. He could see in his dreams nothing more beautiful than the gentleness and harmony of soul that inspired her smile and gave grace to her motions. As evidence of this, one has only to point to the sonnet (p. 38)—

“ Love hath his throne within my lady’s eyes.”

Or that (p. 55) beginning—

“ So kind, so full of gentle courtesy ;”

which, in the original, is considered to be, for beauty of thought, structure, and expression, the finest sonnet in the Italian language.

But, indeed, innumerable instances might be accumulated to confute Mr Hunt's sneer, and to show that Dante's praises of his mistress rested on her gentleness, her looks that “ whate'er they light on seem to bless,” her incomparable smile, her dignity of soul, her grace of motion, her nobility of intellect—all of them good earthly graces,—and not on imaginary celestialities or impossible beauties.


Again, as to the circumstance of Beatrice joining with her friends in the smile at the love-stricken poet's discomposure, Dante might well afford the bard of Rimini his joke, if he could find one in an incident so finely told as this is by the poet. Let us look at the facts. Dante had been taken by a friend to a wedding-party, and unexpectedly finding Beatrice there, a sudden faintness came over him, which compelled him to lean against the wall for support. This naturally formed a theme for sport to the joyous circle of the sunny-hearted dames of Florence, who at such a season were, no doubt, more than usually mirthful, and in this Beatrice

joined, or affected to join, for the latter is more probably the real state of the case. Dante was so overcome with emotion that he withdrew, and if our theory be correct that this was the first time he met Beatrice after her marriage, we can conjecture how terrible the emotion must have been, which so overcame a man accustomed, like him, to the exercise of great self-command.

Dante was quite as much alive as Mr Hunt himself to the ridiculous appearance occasioned by his emotion ; but he could no more shake off the thralldom than the limed bird can escape from the fatal bough. He might protest, rebel, nay, even forswear all vassalage to his mistress. Full soon, however, the bondsman returns to his allegiance. "No sooner," he continues, "do I picture to myself her marvellous beauty, than straightway I am possessed by a desire to behold it; and so strong is this desire, that it kills and utterly destroys in my remembrance whatsoever might rise in opposition to it; and therefore all that I have suffered in the past cannot restrain me from seeking to obtain a sight of her once more" (p. 27); and then his feelings find a vent in the sonnet beginning—

"All angry murmurs die within my breast ;"

which, in its mingled strength and pathos, reveals



glimpses of the power that distinguishes his later writings.

Dante wrestled long and strenuously with his passion. Except in the sonnets of Shakespeare, nowhere do we find a record of such a conflict. For the traces of this we must look beyond the 'Vita Nuova' to such of his sonnets and canzoni as we possess. Thus we find him in one crying out in his agony :—

“Curst be the labour of my love's fond dreams,
The burning thoughts, inwoven in many a lay,
Which I have clothed in fancy's brightest gleams,
To make thee famous through all after-time !
And, oh ! accurst my stubborn memory,
That clings to that which slays me hour by hour,
Thy lovely form, whence Love full oft is found
Launching his perjuries with malicious power,
Till all men make a mock of him and me,
That think of Fortune's wheel to stay the giddy round.”

And in another, after painting in a few brief words the impressive beauty of his mistress's eyes, he continues :—

“‘Here will I come no more,’ I say, but make
All my resolved vows, alas ! in vain.
Still do I turn where I am still subdued,
Giving new courage to my fearful eyes,
That whilom shrank before a blaze so great.
I see her, and they sink, together glued,
And the desire that led my footsteps dies ;
Then, Love, do thou take order for my state.”

Against feelings so earnest as these the ridicule of no man worthy to become a critic of Dante will ever be directed.

But Mr Hunt is not severe upon Dante only. He extends his sarcasm to Beatrice, and with peculiar bitterness. "By constituting her a paragon of perfection, Dante," he says, "enabled her to show that she was none. . . . The fair Portinari laughs and marries another." This is a very curt and simple way of disposing of the matter. Yet surely the fair Portinari may both have smiled and married another, and still in her heart have revered Dante's worth, and given him a place there, not inconsistent with her bridal vow, and not without its solace to the poet in his bereavement. Has the life that lies around us no stories to tell of a love so shut out from its desire, of hearts so comforted by the benign influence of those whom they never may possess? How poor must be the imagination, how shallow the nature in which this story raises no other images but those of a moonish youth and a wayward girl!

One other remark of Mr Hunt's calls for observation. "Not only," he says, "does Dante vaunt the acquaintance of Beatrice in the next world, but he assumes that she returns his love in that region, as if no such person as her husband could have

existed, or as if he himself had not been married also." Passing without comment the misplaced levity with which the remark is made, let us see whether the fact be as Mr Hunt states. We are unable to find one word in the 'Divina Commedia' which assumes that Beatrice returns Dante's love in heaven. It would, indeed, have been inconsistent with the character of the poet's love, as well as with the conception of the poem, had he done so. While yet she brightened the earth for him, Beatrice was as a star, to whom he looked up with unutterable yearnings, yet almost without the hope of reaching it—a star so glorious that he might scarcely fix a lasting gaze upon its radiance—"ove non puote alcun mirarla fiso." In the 'Divina Commedia' she is raised still higher above him. Her words to him there are the words of rebuke—the rebuke of love, indeed, but of a love so pure and holy that it were no less than profanity to speak of it in the terms employed by Mr Hunt. Dante had fallen from the allegiance to the ideal of purity and perfection with which she had inspired him. He was a man of strong passions, and not even the light of her pure eyes could charm him from the paths of folly and the seductions of sense. In this wise, therefore, she accosts him, reminding him of the days when his

heart was kept pure by his dreams of her, and by the high imaginations of his youth :—

“ In his new-life this man was such, that he
Might in himself have wondrously displayed
All noble virtues in supreme degree.
But all the kindlier strength is in the soil,
So do ill germs and lack of culture breed
More noxious growth and ranker wilderness.
I for some term sustained him by my looks ;
To him unveiling my young eyes, I led
His steps with mine along the path of right.
Yet soon as I the threshold gained of this
My second age, and laid life’s vesture down,
He turned from me, and gave himself to others.
When I from carnal had to spirit risen,
And beauty and virtue in me grew divine,
I was less dear to him, and less esteemed ;
And into devious paths he turned his steps,
Pursuing still false images of good,
That make no promise perfect to the hope.
Nor aught availed it ; I for him besought
High inspirations, with the which in dreams,
And otherwise, I strove to lead him back ;
So little warmed his bosom to my call.
To such vile depths he fell, that all device
Had failed for his salvation, save to show
The children of perdition to his eyes.”

—Purg. xxx. 115.

Is there one word here to justify the assertion of Mr Hunt?—one word inconsistent with the purest respect to her who had been the wedded wife of

another, on the one hand, or with Dante's regard for the mother of his children, on the other?

Every line that falls from Beatrice is of the same character. The most important passage occurs in the canto of the "Purgatorio" immediately succeeding that from which we have just quoted. In it Dante, with a grace which is remarkable, mingles the woman's pride in the superiority of her own personal charms with her rebuke for his having stooped to lower feelings than his first noble aspirations towards herself. But the nature must be gross indeed that cannot see the difference between this and the declaration of an earthly attachment:—

“ Nature or art ne'er showed thee aught so sweet
As the fair limbs that girdled me around,
But now are scattered dust aneath men's feet.
And if the chiefest sweet by death were found
To fail thee so, what thing about thy heart
Of mortal mould should, after that, have wound?
Behoved thee, when first stricken by the dart
Of frail and fleeting things, aloft to spring
To me, o'er such uplifted high apart.
It not beseeemed that thou shouldst stoop thy wing
To a slight girl, or other transient, vain,
Delightsome toy, that must thy bosom sting.
The snare may twice or thrice the fledgling chain,
But the full-feathered bird avoids the bolt,
Nor fowler's net can lure him to his bane !”

—Purg. xxxi. 49.

By some commentators Dante is assumed to refer in these lines to his wife, Gemma Donati. Why will these busy speculators not allow to the poet the common virtues of a man? Dante was a true-hearted gentleman, and could never have spoken slightly of her on whose breast he had found comfort amid many a sorrow, and who had borne to him a numerous progeny, the last a Beatrice. No. The obvious allusion is here the true one. Dante, with his strong and ardent passions, had, like meaner men, to fight the perennial conflict between flesh and spirit. Shall we marvel if he fell, and not rather praise the noble frankness of self-rebuke which dragged his shortcomings into view, and stamped them with immortal reprobation?

It is only those who have observed little of human nature, or of their own hearts, who will think that Dante's marriage with Gemma Donati argues against the depth or sincerity of his first love. Why should he not have sought the solace and the support of a generous woman's nature, who, knowing all the truth, was yet content with such affection as he was able to bring to a second love? Nor was that necessarily small. Ardent and affectionate as his nature was, the sympathies of such a woman must have elicited from him a satisfactory

response; while, at the same time, without prejudice to the wife's claim on his regard, he might entertain his heavenward dream of the departed Beatrice. Is not this the natural course of a strong and healthful nature, reconciling itself to the inevitable—not wasting itself in vain lamentations, but seeking comfort in those human sympathies which are never without their balm where rightly sought? How much better this than the querulous solitude into which Petrarch rushed, to feed upon the morbid vanities of his own heart! And how does the essential difference between the love of the two men show itself in the results? In Petrarch, the unnatural fire, fanned by the wings of his imagination, droops and ultimately expires, and, in his old age, he blushes for the love-laden verses of his youth.* In Dante, on the contrary, the flame heightens and expands, shining onwards unto the end with a brighter and broader light; and the concluding pæan of his mighty voice sounds to the glory of her to whom he tuned the music of his earliest song.

* *Illa vulgaria juvenilium laborum meorum cantica, quorum hodie pudet et pœnitet, sed eodem morbo affectis, ut videmus acceptissima.*—De Reb. Fam. Epist. Lib. viii. Epist. 3. One of many passages which might be cited from his works to the same effect.

We have been at some pains to show the unfairness of Mr Hunt's treatment of this subject,—first, because he expresses the opinion of a large class of critics, and next, because the very breadth of sympathy for which he receives credit—and justly—is apt to secure a general assent to his opinions on a matter of this kind. Here, however—as, indeed, in all questions that concern the man Dante—Mr Hunt's usual fairness forsook him. For Ariosto and Tasso he can find extenuations and generous constructions in all doubtful circumstances; but in Dante's case the worst construction seems to be always hailed as the best. Those who have studied Dante know how unjust is Mr Hunt's estimate of his personal character. Let those who have not, read for themselves, and not allow their faith to be shaken in the noble heart and purpose of the man, whose genius as a poet is unquestioned and supreme.

Most love-poetry dwells largely upon the personal graces of its themes, and revels in the minute painting of their various charms. Laura's fine eyes, her beautiful hand, her angelic mouth—“*la bella bocca angelica*”—recur perpetually in Petrarch. The fancy of Ariosto is evermore straying among the golden locks that undulate luxuriantly over the

shoulders of his mistress.* Tasso paints for us the exquisite mouth of his Leonora in colours finer than Titian's :—

“ A crimson shell, where pearls of snowy sheen
Do grow its smooth and curvèd lips atween.”

There is little of this kind of painting in Dante. In speaking of Beatrice's beauty, he dwells little on any particular physical characteristics.

All that we can gather of these is, that her hair was light and her complexion pale, or rather perhaps that exquisite tint, betokening rare delicacy of organisation, suggested in the words of Coleridge —“ Her face, oh, call it fair, not pale !”—Dante

* In the following sonnet, which glances incidentally at this beauty, Ariosto comes nearer than usual to the excellence of the great masters of this form of poem :—

“ *Quando primo i crin d'oro e la dolcezza.*”

“ WHEN first these golden tresses met my view,
These sweetest eyes, the roses fragrant-warm
Of thy red-lips, and every other charm
That me hath made idolatrous of you,
Lady, oh then, methought, the loveliness
Thou took'st from heaven was such, that never more
Might rarer beauty come these eyes before ;
For surely none could more supremely bless.
But, since, thy mind hath poured on mine its light,
Serene and clear, and in my breast it well
Might hold o'er all charms else triumphant place.
Which is most dear, I may not judge aright ;
But this I know, that never yet did dwell
A soul so fair in form of so much grace.”

depicts Beatrice by the impression she produced.* We see the beauty of her soul in her face and deportment. Her smile, the *dolce riso*, had in it a peculiar fascination. When she appears to Dante in the "Purgatorio" this sainted smile draws him to her with its olden meshes :—

" *Lo santo riso*
A se tradì con l'antica rele."—Purg. xxxii.

And in the "Paradiso" (Canto xxx.) he says, like the feeble sight that is dazzled by the sun, so is his spirit dispossessed of itself at the remembrance of that sweetest smile. The thoughtful sweetness of this smile is, indeed, the characteristic most strongly associated with the idea of Beatrice.

But neither in his great work, nor in any of the unquestionably authentic poems, is any one feature mentioned from which an artist could derive a suggestion, unless it be the pearly tincture of her skin. If, however, we may adopt as genuine the canzone which is generally known as "The Portrait," then

* This is always the best species of portrait-painting. Take, for example, the exclamation which bursts from Othello amidst the throes of his jealous rage. "Oh ! the world hath not a sweeter creature. She might lie by an emperor's side, and command him tasks." How much more vivid is the image conveyed of Desdemona's mental and personal graces by these words than by any of the numerous more circumstantial indications in other parts of the play !

we have perhaps the most complete picture of female beauty that ever was painted in words. Fraticelli rejects the poem as doubtful, and his chief reason for doing so is what he thinks its dissimilarity to Dante's generally concise style. This argument, however, is by no means conclusive. Dante, while he says more in fewer words than any writer, drew closely and minutely after nature; and he may very reasonably, we think, be supposed to have sketched the beauties of his mistress after this fashion; which, although detailed, can scarcely be called diffuse:—

“ I gaze upon those amber tresses, where
Hath Love a golden mesh to snare me made,
Sprinkled with flowers, or with a tangled braid
Of pearls,* and feel that I am all undone;
And, chief, I gaze into those eyes so fair,
That shoot through mine into my heart with light
So keen, so radiant, so divinely bright,
It seems as though it issued from the sun.
Still higher doth their mastery o'er me run;
And thus, when I their charms so glorious see,
I murmur to myself with many a sigh,—
Ah me! why am not I
Alone with her, where I could wish to be?
So might I then with those fair tresses play,
Dispart, and lay them wave by wave away,

* “ Her long, loose, yellow locks, like golden wire,
Sprinkled with pearl, and pearling flowers atween,
Do like a golden mantle her attire.”

—Spenser's “Epithalamia.”

And of her eyes, that with a lustre shine
Radiant beyond compare, two mirrors make to mine !
Next on the fair, love-speaking mouth I gaze, '
The spacious forehead, radiant with truth,
White fingers, even nose, and eyebrow smooth
And brown, as though it had been pencilled clear.
So gazing, I exclaim in sweet amaze, —
' Behold what stores of witchery abide
Within that lip so pure, and vermeil-dyed;
Where every sweetness and delight appear !
Oh, when she speaks, to all her words give ear,
Feeling how soft, how gracious is their flow,
That doth the ear with choicest phrase beguile !
And oh, her smile
Outvies in sweetness all things else I know !'
Thus on that mouth it joys me still to pause,
Of it discoursing evermore, because
I would give all that I on earth possess,
To win from that dear mouth one unreluctant Yes !
Then next I view her white and well-turned throat,
Blending into her shoulders and her breast,
Her full, round chin, with dimple small impressed,
More fair than limner's pencil might design ;
And inly say, as I these beauties note,
' That neck, oh, were it not a rare delight,
To hold it in the arms enfolded tight,
And plant upon that throat a little sign !
Give fancy wings !' Thus runs this thought of mine,
' If what thou seest be so surpassing fair,
What must those beauties be, are bid from sight ?
'Tis by the sun and other cressets bright,
That with their glories gem heaven's azure air,
We think its deeps enfold our paradise.
So, if with fixed eyes

Thou gazest, then full surely must thou deem,
Where thou canst see not lies all earthly bliss supreme?
'Her round and queen-like arms I next survey,
Her smooth, soft hand, snow-white ; then deeply eye
Her fingers long, and tapering daintily,
Proud of the ring which one of them doth fold—
'Now wert thou laid,' thus to myself I say,
'Within these arms, a bliss so rare would stir
Through all thy life, divided so with her,
Might ne'er a tithe of it by me be told !'
How picture-like her every limb, behold !
There majesty with beauty holds her seat,
Divinely tintured with a pearl-like hue ;
Gentle and sweet to view,
With looks for scorn, where scornfulness were meet ;
Meek, unpretending, self-controlled, and still
With sense instinctive shrinking from all ill,
Such grace celestial breathes her steps around,
All hearts before her bow in reverence profound.
Comely as Juno's bird her going is,
Self-poised, erect, and stately as a crane ;
One charm peculiarly my heart hath ta'en—
A perfect elegance in act and air.
And wouldst thou truly know how far in this
She doth her place o'er other maids maintain,
Look on her as she moves amidst a train
Of ladies that be elegant and fair ;—
And as the stars, that gem the morning air,
Fade out before the sun's advancing blaze,
So fades each beauty when she shows her face.
Think then what is her fascinating grace,
That equal worth and beauty so displays ;
And both in her are perfect and supreme.
To her can nothing dear or worthy seem

Save honour, courtesy, and gentle heart:
But in her welfare only set thy hopes apart !
My song, thou mayest fearlessly declare,
Since beauty first upon this mortal round
Revealed her gracious light, there was not found
So fair, unparagoned a creature yet :
For blent in her are met
A perfect body and a mind as fair,
Save that some grains of pity wanting are."

Those who are for refining Dante's love into pure spirituality, will not willingly accept for his this beautiful but elaborately detailed portraiture of his mistress. That he does not, in general, write in this strain, is no sufficient argument, however, against the poem being his. The moods of a lover's mind are many and various ; and in some hour of higher hope or more elated spirits, Dante may have written of his mistress in language wherein there is less of that profound reverence, and none of that haunting sadness, which pervades nearly all the poems of which she is the theme.

A tender melancholy is unquestionably the prevailing character of his love-poetry. From the first, his passion seems to have been overshadowed by a dim sense of misfortune. It was not merely the sadness which lies at the bottom of all deep emotion, but an almost prophetic foreboding of disappointment and early death. When a chance

gleam of joy struck across his heart, we find him doubting his claim to the fearful happiness :—

*“ Deh ! per qual dignitate
Così leggiadro questi lo cor have ! ”*

“ Alas ! for what rare worth has he
A heart that beats so light within his breast ! ”

“ His love,” as Mazzini has said with equal truth and beauty, “ is not the pagan love—the joyful, thoughtless, sensual love of Tibullus or Anacreon : it is mournful, troubled by the inexpressible sentiment of incompleteness. At the age when men breathe nothing but hope and pleasure, almost the first dream of Dante is death—the death of his mistress. Nor is it the love of chivalry. Chivalry, owing to that characteristic instinct of equality, which in Italy mistrusted its origin and its feudal tendencies, never took root there ; art and poetry were the national chivalry. It was not the love of Petrarch—love made divine in its expression, but almost vulgarised by its unquiet, querulous aim, agitated during the life of Laura, and accepted as a sort of inevitable misfortune after her death. The love of Dante is calm, resigned submission ; death sanctifies it instead of converting it into remorse. Neither is it the sort of love which characterises an age of transition, and which has been so well defined as *‘ l’égoïsme à deux personnes, ’* a jealous and

convulsive passion, made up of self-love and that thirst for personal wellbeing which narrows the sphere of our activity, and causes us to forget our duties towards our country and towards mankind. No : the love of Dante destroys nothing, it fertilises all—it gives a giant-like force to the sentiment of duty—it expands the soul to the ends of the whole earth : ‘Whenever and wherever she appeared to me, I no longer felt that I had an enemy in the world—such a flame of charity was kindled in my heart, causing me to forgive every one who had offended me’ (‘Vita Nuova’). The power of continuing to go onwards towards perfection and purification, which shone into him from Beatrice, is the constant theme of his poems—it is the love such as Schiller has conceived in his Don Carlos,—such as the future will understand. When Beatrice was married, he fell seriously ill ; when a short time afterwards she died, his life was feared for. But he felt that the death of Beatrice imposed fresh duties upon him, and that what he had now to do was to render himself more and more worthy of her ; he resolved within himself to keep the love for her to the last day of his life, and to bestow upon her an immortality upon earth. He kept his vows. His union with Gemma Donati, in spite of the assertions of those who believe it was unhappy, appears to

have been calm and cold—rather the accomplishment of a social duty than the result of an irresistible impulse of the heart. His short fancies for Gentucca and Madonna Pietra passed over his soul like clouds—above them is the serene heaven, and in this heaven the image of Beatrice remains immovable and shining like the sun of his inner life. He gave her name to one of his daughters, whom Boccaccio saw, a nun at Ravenna. He inspired himself by her memory, not only in the magnificent pages which he consecrated to her towards the close of his life in his poem, but in his worship for woman, which pervades it from one end to the other. In his love for the beautiful, in his strivings after inward purity, Beatrice was the muse of his understanding, the angel of his soul, the consoling spirit which sustained him in exile, in poverty, under a cheerless, wandering, denuded existence, if ever there was one.”—(“Dante Alighieri,” *Foreign Quarterly Review*, vol. xxxii. No. 65.)

The interpretation of the words ‘*Vita Nuova*’ has been a matter of controversy, some translating it ‘*The Early Life*,’ and others adopting the natural, and, as we think, obviously correct interpretation, ‘*The New Life*.’ Dante points as distinctly as possible to this construction in the opening sentences of the book :—

"In that part of the book of my memory, anterior whereto there is little that can be read, there is a rubric which says, *Incipit Vita Nuova*; under which rubric I find written the words which I have it in thought to transcribe into this little book—their substance, at least, if not all the words themselves."

And then he goes on to relate the circumstances attending his first meeting with Beatrice. What can be plainer than this? The poet's life had been but a blank—or, at best, the usual mingled chaos of a boy's life—up to this period. He beheld Beatrice, and

"His soul sprang up astonished, sprang full-statured in an hour."

Then for him a new life began. The ambition of greatness, the intense love of the ideal, the struggle after perfection, took possession of his soul. There is nothing strained or unnatural in this construction. Nay, in the "Purgatorio" he puts the very phrase, with this interpretation of it, into the mouth of Beatrice herself:—

*"Questi fu tal nella sua Vita Nuova
Virtualmente, ch' ogni abito destro
Fatto avrebbe in lui mirabil prova."*

—Canto xxx.

If there were any room to doubt that the poet

here refers to that period of his life when he was directly under the influence of the visible graces of Beatrice—to the *new life*, in short, which he lived, between his first meeting with her and her death—it would be removed by the lines which follow those we have just quoted, and which have been already cited (p. xxx., *supra*).

The period of the *Vita Nuova*, when he was animated by all noble impulses, passed, then, with her life. But, moreover, Beatrice died when Dante was not more than twenty-six,—an age which surely can never be held as the culminating point of early life. Indeed Dante has himself furnished us with his own opinion as to what constitutes “early life;” for in his ‘Convito,’ Tratt. iv. cap. 24, he expressly records it as his estimate that from twenty-five to forty-five is the youth and vigour of a man’s life, the previous stages being childhood and adolescence. If, again, we look to other poets to aid us in interpreting Dante, we shall find no difficulty in showing how common is the feeling which suggested the title in dispute. One instance from Schiller will suffice :—

“His present—his alone—

Is this *New Life* which lives in me. He hath
A right to his own creature. What was I,
Ere his fair love infused a soul into me?”

—Wallenstein, Part I: Act ii. sc. 7.

It is a woman who speaks here—Thekla proclaiming with the grateful generosity of love, that to Max Piccolomini she owed whatever was high and good within her of knowledge, and impulse, and emotion. But the sex is of no consequence to our position. The feeling is as universal as love itself.

The task of transmuting this little book into English is one of no ordinary difficulty. Dante has himself said, and said truly, "That nothing which has been brought into perfect concord by the bonds of rhythm can be transmuted from its own tongue into another, without breaking up all its harmony and sweetness." "*E pero sappia ciascuno, che nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata si puo della sua loquela in altra transmutare senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza e armonia.*"—('Convito,' Tratt. i. cap. 7.) But if this be true of poetry, it is scarcely less true of fine prose—such prose as Dante wrote. "There are pages of the 'Vita Nuova,'" says Mazzini, "those, for example, in which is related the dream of the death of Beatrice, the prose of which is a finished model of language and style far beyond the best pages of Boccaccio." To preserve the feeling, and rhythm, and noble simplicity of these, might well task the greatest mastery of the resources of our language. And when it is remembered that, in any such attempt, the English of our own day

can be of little avail, and that the translator must fall back upon the English of the early part of the seventeenth century, much allowance will be made for the shortcomings of the present version.

The translations of the Poems of the 'Vita Nuova' here reprinted, originally appeared in an essay, by the translator, on "Dante and Beatrice," published in 'Tait's Magazine' in 1845. No other translation having appeared up to 1861, the present version was completed and published in that year, in the belief that it would not be unwelcome to those students of Dante who might be deterred from seeking to become familiar with the original by the difficulty and frequent obscurity of the text. Another version, forming part of a volume of translations from the poets who preceded or were contemporary with Dante, from the hand, powerful both with pen and pencil, of Mr Dante G. Rossetti, and in all respects worthy of his great reputation, was soon afterwards given to the public.

The text of the translation has been carefully revised, and, it is hoped, improved, for the present edition; and in the notes, translations have been included of all Dante's authentic minor poems of the same period—these being not only of the highest value in themselves, but also for the light which they reflect upon the 'Vita Nuova.'

The portrait of Dante by Giotto, which faces the title-page, has been carefully copied from a private plate after a drawing by Mr Kirkup, taken at the time when the fresco of the Bargello was discovered. The eye was found to have been injured. This was soon after restored, but unsuccessfully. A faithful transcript of Giotto's genuine work will, it has been thought, be more valued, and more appropriate to a volume like the present, than one into which a restoration, however dexterous, has been interpolated.



THE NEW LIFE



THE NEW LIFE.



IN that part of the book of my memory, anterior whereto is little that can be read, there is a rubric which says:—
“*Incipit Vita Nova.* Here beginneth the New Life.” Under which rubric I find written the words which I have it in thought to transcribe into this little book—their substance, at least, if not all the words themselves.

Nine times already, since my birth, had the Heaven of light returned to wellnigh the same point in its orbit, when to my eyes was first revealed the glorious lady of my soul, even she who was called Beatrice by many who wist not wherefore she was so called. She was then of such an age, that during her life the starry heavens had advanced towards the East the twelfth part of a degree; so that she appeared to me about the beginning of her, and I beheld her about the close of my, ninth

year. Her apparel was of a most noble colour, a subdued and becoming crimson, and she wore a cincture and ornaments befitting her childish years. At that moment (I speak it in all truth) the spirit of life which abides in the most secret chamber of the heart began to tremble with a violence that showed horribly in the minutest pulsations of my frame; and tremulously it spoke these words:—“*Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi!* Behold a god stronger than I, who cometh to lord it over me!” And straightway the animal spirit which abides in the upper chamber, whither all the spirits of the senses carry their perceptions, began to marvel greatly, and addressing itself especially to the spirits of vision, it spoke these words:—“*Apparuit jam beatitudo vestra.* Now hath your bliss appeared.” And straightway the natural spirit, which abides in that part whereto our nourishment is ministered, began to wail, and dolorously it spoke these words:—“*Hec miser! quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps!* Ah wretched me, for henceforth shall I be oftentimes obstructed!” From that time forth I say that Love held sovereign empire over my soul, which had so readily been betrothed unto him, and through the influence lent to him by my imagination he at once assumed such imperious sway and masterdom over me, that I could not choose but do his pleasure in all things. Oftentimes he enjoined me to strive, if so I might behold this youngest of the angels; wherefore did I

during my boyish years frequently go in quest of her, and so praiseworthy was she, and so noble in her bearing, that of her might with truth be spoken that saying of the poet Homer,—

“She of a god seemed born, and not of mortal man.”

And albeit her image, which was evermore present with me, might be Love's mere imperiousness to keep me in his thrall, yet was its influence of such noble sort that at no time did it suffer me to be ruled by Love, save with the faithful sanction of reason in all those matters wherein it is of importance to listen to her counsel. Were I to dwell upon all the passions and actions of this period of my youth, they would appear like fables. On these, therefore, I shall not pause; but, passing over many matters which may be conceived from the pattern of what I shall relate, I will come to those words which are written in my memory in characters more conspicuous.

When so many days had passed away, after the vision of that most noble lady above recorded, as made up the exact measure of nine years, on the last of these days it came to pass that this wonderful lady appeared to me once more, arrayed in the purest white, between two noble ladies older than herself. And as she passed along the street, she turned her eyes towards the spot where I, thrilled through and through with awe, was standing; and, by her ineffable courtesy, which now hath

its guerdon in everlasting life, she saluted me in such gracious wise that I seemed in that moment to see beatitude in all its length and breadth. The hour her most sweet salutation reached me was certainly the ninth of that day : and forasmuch as this was the first time that words of hers had reached my ears, I was smitten with such delight that I broke away from the company I was in like a drunken man. And having retired within the solitude of my chamber, I sate me down to meditate upon that most courteous lady ; and, as I mused, a sweet sleep came over me, wherein a marvellous vision was presented to my eyes. Methought I saw within my chamber a flame-coloured cloud, in the midst whereof I discerned the figure of a lordly personage, of an aspect terrible to behold, yet wearing in himself an air of such exceeding joyfulness as was most strange to see ; and as he spoke he said many things, of which I understood but few, and amongst them this :—“ *Ego dominus tuus.* I am thy Lord.” Within his arms methought I saw the form as of one asleep, all naked, save only for the light covering of a blood-red scarf ; which I regarding very closely recognised to be the lady of my health, who had the day before vouchsafed to give me salutation ! And he who bore her held within his hand something which was all on fire, and he said to me—“ *Vide cor tuum !* Behold thy heart !” And after a space, methought, he awakened her who slept, and with much persuasion

he constrained her to eat the thing that was burning in his hand, the which she did reluctantly and in fear. This done, his joy straightway resolved itself into the most bitter lamentation ; and so, all in tears, he gathered up the lady into his arms, and went up with her, as it seemed to me, towards heaven ; whereupon my anguish became so great that my fitful slumber was broken, and I awoke. And incontinently I began to consider, and found that the hour in which this vision had appeared to me was the fourth hour—that is, in other words, the first of the nine last hours of the night. Then musing upon what I had seen, I resolved to make it known to the many famous poets of the time ; and, having erewhile proved myself to possess the art of discoursing in rhyme, I determined to make a sonnet, in which, saluting all who were under fealty to Love, and entreating them to expound my vision, I should relate that which I had beheld in my sleep ; and this was the sonnet that I made :—

To every captive soul and gentle heart,
Into whose sight shall come this song of mine,
That they to me its matter may divine,
Be greeting in Love's name, our master's, sent !
A fourth part of the hours was nearly spent,
When all the stars of heaven most brightly shine,
When Love came suddenly before mine eyne,
Remembering whom with horror makes me start.
Joyful he seemed, and bore within his hand
My heart ; while in his arms, and calmly sleeping,
My lady, folded in a mantle, lay.

He woke her, and she ate by his command
The burning heart, as though she feared her prey ;
And then Love went his way, deject and weeping.

This sonnet divides itself into two parts. In the first I send greeting and crave response ; in the second I indicate unto what response is to be made. The second part commences with the words—" A fourth part."

To this sonnet I received replies from many, and of various import, and among those who answered was he whom I call the foremost of my friends, who on this occasion wrote a sonnet beginning, "*Vedesti al mio parere ogni valore*,—All worth, unto my thinking, hast thou seen." And our friendship may be said to date from the time he learned that it was I who had sent it to him. The true meaning of my dream was not then perceived by any one, but now it is manifest to the most simple.

From the time of this vision my natural spirit began to be obstructed in its working, forasmuch as my soul was wholly given up to thinking of that most gracious creature ; whereby I fell ere long into a state of health so delicate and feeble, that my appearance caused much concern to many of my friends ; while others, moved thereunto by malice, cast eagerly about to discover that which above all things I wished to conceal. And I, being well advised of the vile motive of their questionings, did by the prompting of Love, who counselled me in accordance with the dictates of reason, reply to them, that it was Love who had brought me to this

pass ; and this I said, because I bore in my looks so many of his marks, that the fact could not be concealed. And when they asked me, "For whom are you so love-shaken?" I looked at them and smiled, and answered them not again.

It chanced upon a day that this most gracious creature was seated in a certain place, listening to discourse concerning the Queen of Glory, and I was stationed where I could see her who was my bliss ; and in a direct line between her and myself sat a lady of exceeding pleasant favour, who turned her eyes again and again upon me, wondering at my earnest gaze, which seemed to rest upon herself. This gave occasion to many to note how much she eyed me, and so strongly withal, that as I was going out I heard some who were near me say, "Lo now, what havoc such and such a lady is working on his looks!" And by the name I knew they spoke of her who had been seated midway in the direct line which began with that most sweet Beatrice and ended in my eyes. Then was I greatly comforted in the assurance that my looks that day had not betrayed my secret. Thereupon it flashed upon me to make of this lady a screen for the truth, and I soon managed matters so that most of those who concerned themselves about me believed they knew my secret. But I kept it hid by this lady's means for a space of years ; and, the better to conceal it, I made certain trifles about her in rhyme, which it is not my intention to record here, except in so far

as they bear on what I have to say of that most gentle Beatrice ; and therefore I will omit them altogether, with the exception of one which seems to be directed to that lady's praise. I say, then, that during the time when this lady was the screen of a love which on my part was so great, a wish arose within me to record the name of that most gracious creature, and to associate it with the names of many other ladies, and in especial with hers of whom I have spoken ; so, taking the names of sixty of the most beautiful ladies of that city, wherein the lady of my heart had been placed by the Most High, I composed an epistle in the form of a *serventese*, which I shall not transcribe here ; indeed I should not have made mention of it, but only to note what befell in marvellous wise in the composing thereof—namely, that ninth in order, and no otherwise, would the name of my lady stand among the names of the ladies in question.

It happened that the lady by whose means I had so long concealed my inclination, had occasion to leave the aforesaid city, and to go on a long journey, whereupon I was dismayed at the loss of my beautiful defence, beyond what I could beforehand have believed ; and thinking, if I did not speak of her departure with some regret, my secret would be more apt to be discovered, I determined to make some lamentation in a sonnet, which I shall transcribe, because the lady of my heart was the immediate cause of certain expressions that

occur in it, as those who comprehend it will readily see. This sonnet was as follows :—

OH, ye who in Love's paths wayfarers be,
Attend and see,
If there be any sorrow like to mine.
Unto my tale, I pray, your ear incline,
Then say, if I not be
Of every grief the garner and the key !
Love, not for any slender worth of mine,
But in the bounty of his noble heart,
Me with a life so calm and sweet hath blessed,
That ofttime to mine ear a voice would start,
“ For what rare worth hath he
A heart that sits so lightly in his breast ? ”
Now gone is utterly the fearless mind,
Rich in Love's priceless gain ;
And I so poor remain,
That courage scarce to speak of it I find !
And thus, like him, his penury who fain
Would hide for shame, upon my brow I wear
A light and jocund air,
When all my secret heart is racked with pain.

This sonnet has two principal divisions. In the first my object is to appeal to the liege subjects of Love in the words of the prophet Jeremiah : “ O vos omnes, qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte, si est dolor sicut dolor meus ;—Oh all ye who pass by, behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow,” and to entreat them to give me a hearing ; in the second I describe the state in which Love had placed me, but in a sense different from what is expressed in the close of the sonnet, and declare what I have lost. The second

division commences with the words—"Love, not for any," &c.

Soon after this lady had gone away, it pleased the Lord of the Angels to call unto His glory a young and most well-favoured lady, who was held in much esteem in the aforesaid city; whose body I saw lying, untreasured of its soul, amidst a bevy of ladies, who were weeping most piteously. Thereupon remembering me that I had erewhile seen her in the company of that most gracious creature, I could not choose but weep; and in my sorrow I resolved to write some lines upon her death, in guerdon of her having been sometimes seen with the lady of my heart, which I did slightly glance at towards the end of what I wrote, as all who apprehend my meaning will discern. And I wrote these two sonnets—the first commencing, "*Weep, Lovers, Weep!*" and the second, "*Ungentle Death!*"

WEEP, lovers, weep, for Love himself is weeping.
When ye shall learn the cause he hath for tears!
Love the lamenting voice of ladies hears,
Whose sorrow their sweet eyes in tears is steeping;
For churlish Death a cruel deed of shame
Hath wrought on heart that was of noble mould,
Destroying all the world must dearest hold
In gentle lady, save her honoured name!
Now, mark what honour Love to her did pay!
For I beheld him, with the pallid face
Of anguish, o'er her clay-cold body bent,
And ofttime to the sky his gaze was sent,
Where now that gentle spirit hath its place,
That lady was of countenance so gay.

This sonnet divides itself into three parts. In the first I call entreatingly upon the liege subjects of Love to weep, and say that their Lord is weeping, and that they, hearing the cause wherefore he weeps, will be the more disposed to give ear unto me; in the second I state the cause; and in the third I speak of a certain honour done by Love unto the lady in question. The second part begins with the words—"Love the lamenting voice," &c. The third with—"Now, mark."

UNGENTLE Death ! compassion's enemy,
 Mother of grief, since Time began to be !
 Inexorable doom of souls forlorn,
 Since ever thou my joy from me hast torn,
 That makes me sadly mourn,
 My tongue is wearied in dispraise of thee.
 Sue not for pardon ! I will spurn thy plea.
 'Tis meet that all the world should hear from me
 Thy crime—of unblest deeds the most unblest.
 Already spreads its fame from east to west;
 But I in every breast,
 Where love is nursed, would kindle hate of thee.
 Thou from the world hast driven fair courtesy,
 And what of lady is the chiefest flower,
 Virtue in youth's glad hour,
 All love-inspiring grace, and gladsome witchery.
 Not more will I disclose of what I see
 In her I sing, than may be known by this ;
 Who merits not heaven's bliss,
 Ne'er let him hope to bear her company !

This sonnet divides itself into four parts. In the first I invoke Death by some of her appropriate epithets; in the second, addressing her directly, I state the reason

which moves me to chide her; in the third I revile her; in the fourth I address a person undefined to others, although to my own mind he is completely defined. The second part begins—"Since ever thou." The third with—"Sue not for pardon." The fourth with—"Who merits not."

A few days after the death of this lady I had occasion to quit the aforesaid city, and to go towards that part of the country where dwelt the lady who had formerly been my defence; although the limit of my journey did not extend so far as to where she was. And notwithstanding I was, to appearance, one of a numerous company, the journey caused me such disquietude, that my sighs were powerless to alleviate the torture of my heart at the thought, how every step carried me farther from her who was my bliss. And thus it befell that my most gracious master Love, who held me in thrall by virtue of that most gentle lady, appeared to my imagination in the likeness of a pilgrim, scantily and most meanly clad. He wore a dejected air, and his eyes were bent upon the ground, save that, methought, he would ever and anon turn them to a clear running stream that wimpled by the side of the road on which I was. Calling me by name, meseemed that he addressed me thus:—"I come from the lady who has for long been thy defence, and I know that she will no more return; wherefore have I now with me that heart which I caused thee to leave with her, and am bearing it to a lady

who will henceforward be thy defence, as she was." (And he named her to me, so that I knew her well.) "Natheless, shouldst thou repeat any of the words which I have spoken to thee, do so in such wise that the simulated love may not be discovered which thou hast professed for that lady, and which it will henceforth behove thee to profess for another." And having thus spoken, of a sudden this creature of my imagination altogether vanished, in consequence of the exceeding great portion of himself which Love, as it seemed to me, had endowed me withal; and changed in my whole aspect, I rode onward all that day wrapped in meditation, and accompanied by many sighs. The next day I began the following sonnet:—

RIDING some days ago in piteous mood,
 Heart-sick and weary with the journey's fret,
 Full in the middle of the way I met
 Love in a pilgrim's habit, worn and rude.
 His air, methought, was saddened and subdued,
 As he had been despoiled of his sway;
 And he came, sadly sighing, up the way,
 With downcast eyes, unwilling to be viewed.
 When he beheld me, calling me by name,
 "I come," he said, "from yon far region, now,
 Where dwelt thy heart, while that to me seemed fit,
 And for new service back am bringing it."
 Then I so wrapt in thought of him became,
 That he had vanished, and I knew not how.

This sonnet has three parts. In the first I state in what way I encountered Love, and the aspect he

bore; in the second I state what he said to me, but not wholly, fearing lest thereby I might reveal my secret; in the third I state how he disappeared. The second begins with—"When he beheld me." The third with—"Then I so wrapt."

After my return I set myself to seek out the lady whom my master had named to me on the Road of Sighs; and, to be brief, I soon made her so completely my defence, that the thing was spoken of by many in terms which passed the bounds of courtesy, whereby I was often much distressed. And on this account—that is to say, because of these slanderous tongues, by which I was, it seems, arraigned of shameful vice—that most gentle being, who was the destroyer of every vice, and the very queen of virtue, as she passed me on a time, denied me that most gracious salutation, which was my all-in-all of bliss. And here, diverging somewhat from the matter in hand, I would fain make it be understood, of what rare virtue was the influence which her salutation wrought upon me. I say, then, that whenever and wherever she appeared, in the hope of that most priceless salute, I had no longer an enemy in the world, such a flame of charity was kindled within me, making me to forgive every one who had done me wrong; and had I then been questioned of any matter soever, I should, with looks clothed with humility, have answered nought but "Love." And when she was on the verge of giving me her greet-

ing, the spirit of love coursed through my blood, deadening every other sense ; then, mounting into my eyes, it drove forth my quailing powers of vision, bidding them do homage to their lady, and he alone remained where they had been. And whoso had wished to see and know Love had only to look upon the tremor of my eyes. And when this most sweet lady did actually vouchsafe me her salute, Love had no power to veil from me the intolerable bliss, but bred within me such very excess of sweetness, that my body, being wholly possessed by it, frequently moved like a heavy dead thing ; whereby most clear it is, that in her salutation was centred all my bliss—a bliss which was oftentimes greater than I could bear.

To resume. I say, then, that, my bliss being denied me, I was affected by such profound grief, that, rushing away from the crowd, I sought a lonely spot wherein to bathe the earth with my most bitter tears ; and when, after a space, these tears were somewhat abated, I betook myself to my chamber, where I could give vent to my grief unheard. And there, imploring the Lady of Mercy for pity, and saying, “Oh, Love, help thy faithful servant !” I fell asleep, weeping like a beaten child. And lo, about the middle of my slumber, I seemed to see within my chamber, and seated by my side, a youth arrayed in garments of exceeding whiteness, and wrapt in thought. His eyes were bent upon me where I lay, and when he had gazed upon me for

a time, methought he sighed and addressed me in these words :—" *Fili mi, tempus est ut prætermittantur simulata nostra.* My son, the time is come for laying our pretexts aside." On this I seemed to recognise him, forasmuch as he accosted me by the same title as he had occasionally done before in my sleep ; and, looking intently upon him, he seemed to be weeping piteously, and waiting for me to speak. Wherefore, taking heart, I thus addressed him :—" Noble sir, wherefore do you weep ?" And he made answer to me thus :—" *Ego tanquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentiæ partes ; tu autem non sic.* I am, as it were, the centre of a circle, to which all parts of the circumference bear the same relation ; but thou art not so." Reflecting on his words, it seemed to me he had spoken very obscurely, and, forcing myself to speak, I said :—" What is this, my lord, that thou hast spoken so darkly ?" And he answered me in the vulgar tongue :—" Ask no more than is useful for thee to know." Thereupon I began to converse with him touching the salutation which was denied me ; and when I questioned him of the cause, his reply was to this effect :—" Yonder Beatrice of ours has heard from certain persons, who talked of thee, that the lady whom I named to thee on the Road of Sighs has suffered some annoyance at thy hands : and therefore that most gracious creature, who is the opposite of all that can offend, did not deign to salute thee, fearing she too might

suffer thereby. Wherefore, although of a truth thy secret is through long usage in some measure known to her, I wish thee to indite certain words in rhyme, wherein thou shalt set forth the power which I hold over thee through her, and how thou didst all at once and for ever become her own from thy very boyhood ; and cite, as witness of thy tale, him who knows it, and say how thou entrest him to speak of it to her ; and I, who am that he, will gladly discourse to her of these things, and thereby she will comprehend thy intention and desire, understanding which she will construe aright the words of those who are deceived concerning thee. And so write, that thy words shall seem to be those of a third person, and not addressed by thyself directly to her, which were unbecoming. Neither send them anywhere without me, whereby they may be rightly apprehended by her, and let them be graced with sweet harmony, wherein shall I at all needful seasons be present." And having thus spoken he vanished, and my sleep was broken. Reflecting on this vision, I found that it appeared to me at the ninth hour of the day. And before I left my room I resolved to indite a ballad, wherein I should observe all that my master had enjoined : and this is the ballad that I made :—

My song, I'd have you find out Love, and straight
With him unto my lady sweet repair,
That my dear lord may urge the suit you bear,
With his o'ermastering tongue's persuasive weight.

Thy bearing is so courteous, oh my lay,
That e'en alone thou durst,
Go where thou wilt, look up with fearless glance !
But if thou wouldst securely take thy way,
Search out love first ;
To move without him were not well, perchance ;
For she, to whom I'd have thee now advance,
My mind misgives, is with me much offended ;
And if by him thou shouldst not come attended,
She thy fair errand haply might misprize.
Soft let thy voice, when thou art with her, be,
And thus thy strain begin,
Invoking pity first thy part to take :—
“ Madonna, he, whose messenger I be,
Thy gentle ear would win,
To list to me, while his defence I make.
Here standeth Love, who, for thy beauty's sake,
Transforms my master's image at his will ;
Then think, how, whilst his heart's unaltered still,
Love makes him seem to woo another's eyes.”
Tell her,—“ Madonna, with a faith so fast
His heart to yours is wrought,
That all his thoughts are bent on serving you ;
Yours early, yours he shall be to the last ! ”
If she believe thee not,
Bid her of Love demand, if thou be true ;
And, last of all, thy humble prayer renew,
That she forgive my wrong, if wrong there be.
Or let her bid me die, and she shall see
Her servant can obey the stern behest.
And say to him, whom all kind thoughts do sway,—
“ Ere from her feet thou stir,
Urge thou my plea, till she admit it there.
In virtue of my not unpleasing lay,
Abide thou here with her,

And for thy servant win the guerdon fair.
If she forgive him, yielding to thy prayer,
Let her proclaim his peace with her dear smile."
Now go, my gentle song, but choose the while
Thou shalt have honour as a welcome guest !

This ballad divides itself into three parts. In the first I tell it where to go, and encourage it so that it may go with more confidence, and I state by whom it is to go accompanied, if it wishes to go securely and without any danger ; in the second I state what it behoves it to explain ; in the third I give it liberty to go whensoever it pleases, commending its course to the arms of Fortune. The second part begins with—"Soft let thy voice." The third with—"Now go, my gentle song." It is possible some one may object to me that it is not clear whom I address in the second person, since the ballad is neither more nor less than the very words I am speaking ; and therefore I say that I purpose to resolve this doubt and to make it clear at another passage in this book, which is even more obscure ; and then let him understand, who doubts or is minded to object in the above strain.

After the vision described above, and when I had indited the words which Love had enjoined me to compose, many and diverse thoughts began to assail me, each of them pressing upon me with a force not to be denied ; of which four did in an especial manner rob me of my rest. One was,—
"The empyr of Love is good, forasmuch as it

diverts the mind of its vassal from whatsoever is base." Another was,—“The empire of Love is not good, forasmuch as the more absolute the allegiance of his vassal, the more severe and woeful are the straits through which he perforce must pass.” Another was,—“The name of Love is so sweet to the ear, that it seems to me impossible for its effect in most things to be otherwise than sweet, seeing that names take after the things named, as it is written, *Nomina sunt consequentiæ rerum*.” The fourth was,—“The lady by whom Love has achieved such mastery over you is not like other ladies, that her heart should readily be moved.” And by each of these thoughts was I so sorely assailed, that I was brought to a pause, like one that on a journey is perplexed which path he shall choose—that would fain go on, yet knoweth not on which hand to turn. And if I bethought me to select a path which was common to them all, that is, one in which they might all meet—to wit, that of invoking and throwing myself into the arms of pity—yet was that path most distasteful unto me. And whilst I was in this mood, the desire seized me to write something in rhyme, and so I composed this sonnet:—

OF Love, Love only, speaks my every thought;
And all so various they be, that one
Bids me bow down to his dominion;
Another counsels me, his power is nought.
One, flushed with hopes, is all with sweetness fraught;

Another makes full oft my tears to run;
 Discordant all, save that, by fears undone,
 They strive how gentle pity may be wrought.
 Where, then, to turn, what think, I cannot tell.
 Fain would I speak, yet know not what to say,
 I in Love's mazes am bewildered so :
 And if I would this jarring strife allay,
 Then must I make petition to my foe,
 My Lady Pity, that she guard me well.

This sonnet may be divided into four parts. In the first I announce the proposition that all my thoughts are of Love; in the second I state that they are various, and mention wherein they are so; in the third I show wherein they appear all to agree; In the fourth I say, that, wishing to speak of Love, I know not from which of these to take my argument; and if I would take from them all, I must needs invoke my enemy, the Lady Pity. I use the word Lady in an ironical sense. The second begins with—"And all so various," &c. The third—"Discordant all." The fourth—"Where, then, to turn."

After this conflict of various thoughts, it chanced that this most gracious lady was present in a numerous assemblage of gentlewomen, to which I was introduced by a friend, who thought to afford me great pleasure by taking me where so many ladies of rare beauty were to be seen. But I, weeting not whither I was to be taken, and relying on this person, who had led his friend unto the very verge of death, inquired, "To what end are we come among these ladies?" To which he replied,

“To this end, that they may be worthily attended.” And true it is, they were assembled there around a gentlewoman who had that day been wedded; and such being the custom of that city, it was meet that she should be so attended on first taking her seat at table in the mansion of her new spouse; so that I, thinking to please my friend, resolved to stay and join with him in doing suit and service to those ladies. But no sooner had I come to this resolve than I felt a strange tremor in my left side, which spread apace over all my body. Thereupon I made a feint of leaning against a painting which covered the wall of the house, and fearing that my emotion might be observed, I raised my eyes, and looking towards the ladies, beheld among them the most gentle Beatrice. Straightway my spirits were so distraught by the vehemence of Love, on finding myself so near that most gentle lady, that nothing remained to me of life but the spirits of vision, and even these were driven forth from their own organs, forasmuch as Love determined to occupy their most honoured place that he might behold that admirable lady; and although I was no longer myself, my heart ached within me for those lesser spirits who made sore lament, crying,—“If he (Love) had not hurled us from our place, we also should have stood, even as others who are like ourselves, to gaze upon this marvel of her kind.” Then many of these ladies, observing my confusion, began to marvel; and they fell to whispering with

that sweet lady and making mock of me ; whereupon my friend, taken quite aback, and at a loss what to understand, took me by the hand, and leading me aside, asked me what was amiss. Then having rested awhile, and the spirits which had died within me having risen to life again, and those which had been chased away having returned to their abodes, I made answer to my friend,—“ I have set my foot in that part of life, to pass beyond which with purpose to return is impossible.” And bidding him adieu, I returned home into the chamber of tears, and there weeping, and blushing as I wept, I said to myself,—“ If this lady did but know my condition, she would not thus, methinks, make sport of my appearance ; rather would she, I believe, be moved to pity.” And in this mood of sadness I bethought me to write some lines, wherein, addressing myself to her, I should explain the reason of my agitation ; telling her I was well apprised that she wist not of it, and that, were it otherwise, her pity, I was sure, would not have been withheld from me ; and this I did in the hope that what I wrote might peradventure reach her ears. Thereupon I wrote this sonnet :—

WITH other ladies thou dost flout at me,
Nor thinkest, lady, whence doth come the change,
That fills mine aspect with a trouble strange,
When I the wonder of thy beauty see.
If thou didst know, thou must for charity
Forswear the wonted rigour of thine eye ;

For when Love finds me near thee, he so high
Dominion takes and scornful mastery,
That on my trembling spirits straight he flies,
And some he slays, and some he drives away,
Till he alone remains to gaze on thee.
Thence am I changed into another's guise ;
Yet not so changed, but that the pangs with me,
Which tortured so those exiled spirits, stay.

This sonnet I divide not into parts; because such division is made solely to make plain the meaning of the thing divided: but inasmuch as the train of thought is here sufficiently clear, there is no occasion for division. True it is, that in the passage where I explain the circumstance which gave rise to this sonnet, there are some ambiguous expressions—those, I mean, where I say that Love slays all my spirits, and that those of vision remain in life, though extraneously to their organs. Now this is ambiguous, and impossible to explain to any one who is not in like degree the liegman of Love; but to those who are, the meaning of these ambiguous words is obvious. Therefore were it not well for me to clear away such doubts, seeing that my discourse would be either bootless or superfluous.

After the change came over me which has been just recorded, I fell into a mood of thought, which took strong hold of me, and scarcely ever left me; but would evermore recur, arguing with me in this wise:—"Seeing thou dost present an aspect so ridiculous, whenever thou art near this lady, wherefore dost thou seek to come into her presence? Were this question asked of thee by her, what

answer wouldst thou have to make, even wert thou so far master of thy faculties that thou couldst make answer to her at all?" And to this another thought thus humbly made reply:—"If that I lost not the command of my faculties, and were so far master of myself as to be able to reply, I would say to her, 'That no sooner do I picture to myself her marvellous beauty, than straightway I am possessed by a desire to behold it; and so strong is this desire, that it kills and utterly destroys in my remembrance whatsoever might rise in opposition to it; and therefore all that I have suffered in the past cannot restrain me from seeking to obtain a sight of her once more.'" Whereupon, stirred by these reflections, I resolved to write some lines in which, while deprecating such rebuke from her, I might show what I felt when in her presence; and so I composed this sonnet:—

ALL angry murmurs die within my breast,
Fair jewel, whensoever I look on thee;
And still when thou art near, Love whispers me,
"Fly, if to thee Death be no welcome guest!"
Upon my face my heart's hue is impressed,
That leans on any prop that may be nigh;
The very stones seem shrieking out "Die, die!"
So wild my fears, so cruel my unrest.
A sinful man is he who sees me then,
Nor does not seek by pity's kindly breath
To soothe my soul in its so dread despair;
That pity, which, alas! your scorn hath slain,
Whose sad effects speak in the death-like glare
Of these poor eyes, that fain would close in death.

This sonnet divides itself into two parts. In the first I state the reason why I cannot abstain from hovering near this lady; in the second I state what befalls me when I approach her, beginning with the words—"And still when thou art near." Again, this second part has five divisions, according to the five different facts narrated. Thus in the first I say what Love, counselled by reason, tells me when I am near her; in the second, I show forth the state of my heart by that of my countenance; in the third I declare how I am bereft of all my self-control; in the fourth I protest that sinful is the man who shows not pity for me, in such wise as would be of comfort to me; in the last I show why it is meet that other men should feel for me, because, to wit, of that piteous look which comes into my eyes, but which is destroyed, or, in other words, is not apparent to others, because of the mocking of this lady, who moves others to the like action, who perchance would, but for this, have seen this piteous look. The second part begins—"Upon my face." The third—"The very stones." The fourth—"A sinful man is he." The fifth—"That pity, which, alas!"

After what I have just mentioned, this sonnet stirred within me a desire to write something in which I should express four other particulars concerning my state, which I conceived had not as yet been made clear. The first of these was the grief that oftentime came over me, when memory, wrought upon by fancy, made me to see what Love

had made of me ; the second was, that Love often assailed me of a sudden with such force that the only life left within me was a thought that spoke of my liege lady ; the third was, that, when Love made onslaught upon me in this wise, I betook me, all wan and woe-begone, into the lady's presence, believing the sight of her would be a buckler of defence to me against her assaults, forgetting the while what must befall me from the proximity to such beauty and nobleness ; the fourth was, how the sight of her not only was no defence unto me, but in the end made total discomfiture of what little life was left me. Therefore it was that I composed this sonnet :—

FULL many a time I ponder on the drear
 And heavy hours which Love doth make my doom ;
 And then I cry, " Alas ! " in piteous cheer,
 " Was ever fate like mine, so wrapt in gloom ? "
 For love with sudden shock assails me so,
 That I of life am well-a-nigh forsaken ;
 One power alone remains, and that to show
 The beauties forth that so my soul have shaken.
 Then I resolve,—this shall no longer be,
 And come to seek thee, all amort and pale,
 Thinking by sight of thee to cure my pain ;
 But when I lift mine eyes to look on thee,
 My heart within my bosom 'gins to quail,
 And my perturbèd soul takes flight from every vein.

This sonnet divides itself into four parts, according to the four separate facts which it records ; and as these have been already expounded, I shall merely dis-

tinguish these parts by their beginnings; wherefore I say that the second part begins—"For Love with sudden shock." The third "Then I resolve." The fourth—"But when I lift."

After I had made these three sonnets, in which I spoke to this lady, seeing that they told well-nigh all that was to be told of my state, it was my purpose to write no more, considering that I had spoken enough concerning myself. But although I was never afterwards to address herself, I felt impelled to take up another subject, and one more noble than the past. And as the occasion which gave rise to it is pleasant to hear, I will relate it as briefly as I may.

Through the changes in my looks the secret of my heart was now known to many; and certain ladies, to whom it was well known (they having often seen how sorely I was troubled), had met together on a day, drawn by delight in each other's society. Happening to pass that way, led, as it were, by lucky chance, one of these ladies called to me to approach. She who so called me was very gay and pleasant of discourse; so when I came in among them, and saw that my most gracious lady was not there, I recovered my courage, and, saluting them, inquired what might be their pleasure. There were many ladies there, some of whom were laughing among themselves, whilst others regarded me as if in expectation of what I should say. Others there were who talked together, of whom

one, turning her eyes upon me, and calling me by name, addressed me thus:—"Unto what end lovest thou this lady, seeing her mere presence overwhelms thee? Tell us, for of a surety the end and aim of such a love must be of the strangest." And when she had thus spoken, not she only, but all the others, fixed their gaze upon me, awaiting my reply. Thereupon I made answer:—"The end and aim of my love hath until now been the salutation of this lady, of whom belike you speak, and in that salutation I found the bliss which was the goal of all my desires. But since it pleaseth her to deny it to me, Love, my liege lord, in guerdon of my fealty, has placed all my happiness in something which can in no wise fail me." Thereupon these ladies fell to conversing among themselves; and as upon occasion we see rain falling mingled with fair flakes of snow, so did their words seem to me intermingled with sighs. And when they had talked together for a time, the lady who had previously spoken, once more addressed me thus:—"Tell us, we pray thee, wherein abides this happiness of thine?" And I made answer thus:—"In the words which speak the praises of my lady." And she replied:—"If thou sayest sooth, then those words which thou hast spoken, as expressive of thy state, must have been put forth by thee with some other purpose." Whereupon, reflecting on these words, a sense of shame came over me, and I took my leave; and as I went I said within my-

self,—“Since there is happiness so great in those words which speak the praises of my lady, wherefore hath my speech of her been other than thus?” And I determined for the future to take the praises of that most gracious being as the only theme of my discourse. But after much thought thereon, meseemed I had chosen a theme so much too lofty for my poor self that I had not the courage to begin; and thus for some days I hung in suspense between the desire to write and the fear of beginning. Then it chanced that walking one day along a road, by the side of which ran a stream of crystal clearness, I was seized with a desire to sing of her so strong, that straightway I began to consider in what terms I should couch my strain; and I thought it would be unmeet to sing of her, save to ladies and in the second person, and not to every lady either, but only to such as were pure and noble. Whereupon I declare that, as it were spontaneously, the following words mounted to my lips,—

Ladies, who in Love's lore are deeply read!

These words I treasured up in my mind with great delight, thinking to use them for the opening of my lay; wherefore having returned home, after some days of meditation, I began the following canzone:—

LADIES, who in Love's lore are deeply read,
I of my lady would discourse with you;
I cannot paint her worth in colours true,
Yet will my heart be eased by this essay.

When all her graces rise before my view,
Such sweetness on my soul by love is shed,
That, if I then but dared the theme pursue,
The world would be enamoured of my lay.
In no aspiring verse will I portray
Her charms, lest fear should shame my trembling wing;
But of her noble nature I will sing,
In strains that feebly all her worth display,
To you, fair dames and damosels, for this
Is not a theme for meaner ears, I wis.

An angel, gifted high with godlike thought,
Calls out, and says, "Sire, in the world are seen
Deeds passing wonder, by a soul ywrought
Whose brightness e'en thus high reflects its sheen!"
The heavens, which, saving her, did lack for nought,
For this excelling gift its lord besought,
And every saint put up a suppliant prayer.
Pity alone for us stept in between.
"What judgeth God, shall with Madonna fare?"
"Belovèd well of me, in patience bear,
That, while me pleaseth so, your hope serene
Should tarry, where is one her loss shall wail,
And who will tell the accurst who writhe in bale,
I of the blest the blessed hope have seen."

In the high heavens they for Madonna long;
Now would I make you of her worth to know.
Let her, I say, who would seem noble, go
Still by her side; for when she passeth by,
Love casts on villain hearts a blight so strong,
That all their thoughts are numbed and stricken low;
And whom he grants to gaze on her must grow
A thing of noble stature, or must die.
And when he finds a man that in her eye

May fitly stand, that man her worth approves,
Health-giving joy within his bosom moves,
And wrong-forgetting, meek humility,
Still higher grace to him kind Heaven doth send,
For who hath talked with her can have no evil end.

Love says of her, "Can aught of mortal clay
Be all so pure, all so divinely fair?"
Then, as he gazes, to himself doth swear,
Heaven meant in her a paragon to frame.
Her skin is tinct like pearl, yet such as may
A lady in her beauty fitly wear.
She is the sum of all on earth most rare;
Beauty by her bright standard tests its claim.
From her sweet eyes Love's thrilling soul of flame
Goes sparkling forth, whene'er she looks around,
Striking the eyes that on her charms are bound,
And piercing, till each heart doth feel its blame.
You see Love pictured on her face; but who
May dare with steadfast eye that face to view?

My Song, with ladies manifold, I know,
Thou wilt converse, when thou shalt forth be sent,
Then heed my counsel, since I've nursed thy bent,
As Love's own daughter, gentle, young, and gay.
Be this thy prayer, wherever thou dost go:—
"Teach me the way to her, whose praise is blent
In all my lines,—their glorious ornament!"
And that my task its end accomplish may,
Linger not thou with men of vulgar clay;
Strive, if so be thou canst, that thou be shown
To man or maid of courteous heart alone,
For these eftsoons will speed thee on thy way.
Where she is, thou wilt find Love seated too;
Commend me to him, as behoves thee do.

To the end this canzone may be better understood, I will divide it more curiously than I have done the pieces which precede it, and therefore I make of it three parts. The first is the proëmium; the second the theme to be treated; the third is as it were auxiliary to what has gone before. The second begins with the words—"An angel, gifted high." The third with—"My song, with ladies manifold." The first part divides itself into four; in the first I state to whom I wish to discourse of my lady, and why; in the second I state what her worth appears in my eyes when I muse upon it, and how I would sing of it, did not my courage fail me; in the third I state how I trust to sing, so as not to be hindered by my own unworthiness; in the fourth, repeating once again for whom I intend to sing, I state the reason why I sing to them. The second begins—"When all her graces." The third—"In no aspiring verse." The fourth—"To you, fair dames." With the words—"An angel, gifted high," I begin to treat of this lady; and this part subdivides itself into two. In the first I express how she is esteemed of in heaven; in the second I express how she is esteemed of upon earth, at the words—"In the high heavens they for Madonna long." This second part divides itself into two, in the first of which I discourse of her as touching the nobleness of her soul, mentioning several of the graces which emanate from her soul; in the second I discourse of her as touching the nobleness of her body, mentioning some of her beauties in the words—"Love says of her," &c. This

second part subdivides itself into two ; for in the first I mention sundry charms which embrace her whole person ; whilst in the second I draw attention to particular charms in the words—"From her sweet eyes." Again, this second part has two divisions ; for in one I speak of the eyes, which are the beginning of Love ; in the second, of the mouth, which is the end of Love. And in order that every vicious thought may be dispelled, let whoso reads remember, that above it is written, that this lady's salutation, which was an act of her mouth, was the goal of my desires, so long as it was permitted me to receive it. In the words that follow—"My song," &c., I add a stanza as the handmaiden, as it were, of the others, in which I state what it is that I desire of this my song ; and forasmuch as this part is easy to understand, I do not trouble myself with more subdivisions. True it is, that, more fully to develop the meaning of this canzone, resort should be had to subdivisions more minute ; natheless I am content, that he who has not wit enough to understand it by the help of those already given, should let it alone ; for truly I fear, I have already imparted its meaning to too many by the foregoing subdivisions, if peradventure it should chance to reach the ears of many.

This canzone having been somewhat noised about, one of my friends, hearing it, besought me to expound to him, "What is Love ?" he having peradventure conceived hopes of me, from hearing this canzone, that outran the measure of my deserts.

Thereupon, thinking that, after such a poem as the above, to write something about Love would be not unmeet ; thinking, moreover, that it behoved me to oblige my friend, I determined to write some lines in which I should discourse of Love. This sonnet was the result :—

THEY are the same, Love and the gentle heart !
 So runs the saw, which from the sage I stole ;
 Nor can they more abide, from each apart,
 Than reason parted from the reasoning soul.
 Nature in genial hour created these,
 Love to be king, the heart his royal place,
 Where slumbering he lies, and takes his ease,
 A moment now, now for a lengthened space.
 Beauty, in lady breathing thoughtful breath,
 Comes, witching all ; then in the heart doth grow
 Desire of that which makes its great delight ;
 And lingering there, so long it tarrieth,
 That it awakes the sleeping Love ; and so
 Hath manly worth in lady equal might !

This sonnet divides itself into two parts. In the first I speak of love as he is in power ; in the second as he is when his power translates itself into action. The second begins at—"Beauty, in lady." The first part has two divisions. In the first I state in what subject this power abides ; in the second how this subject and this power are begotten together, and how the one has regard to the other, as form to matter. The second begins at—"Nature in genial hour." When afterwards I say—"Beauty, in lady," &c., I show how this power reduces itself to action first in man,

and afterwards in woman, in the words—"And so hath manly worth," &c.

Having thus discoursed of Love in the above verses, the desire came upon me to write also in praise of that most gracious being some words in which I might express how this love is awakened by her, and awakened withal not only where it is merely dormant, but even, such is her marvellous influence, where it had no previous existence. This gave rise to the following sonnet:—

LOVE hath his throne within my lady's eyes,
 Whence all she looks on wears his gracious mien.
 All turn to gaze, where she abroad is seen,
 And whom she greets from him his colour flies;
 With downward gaze he stands abashed, and sighs,
 Remembering all his own unworthy blames.
 Anger and pride before her fly. Ye Dames,
 Lend me your aid, her matchless worth to prize!
 All gentleness, all thoughts serene and meek,
 Grow in the heart of him that hears her voice.
 To see her once is ever to rejoice;
 Her look, when a faint smile is on her cheek,
 Nor tongue can tell, nor memory hold in view,
 So winning-gracious is the sight, and new.

This sonnet has three parts. In the first I show how this lady brings this power into action, by means of her eyes, that most noble feature; and in the third I show how the same result is wrought by that other most noble part, her mouth; and between these two parts of the sonnet comes a brief passage, which calls, as it were, for aid, both for what goes before and what

follows it, beginning with the words—"Ye Dames, lend me your aid." The third commences at—"All gentleness." The first has three divisions. In the first I state with what excelling power she ennoble whatever she looks upon, which is as much as to say, that she kindles Love into being where before he was not. In the second I say how she quickens Love into action in the hearts of all those on whom she looks. In the third I speak of the influence which forthwith works within their hearts. The second begins at—"All turn to gaze." The third at—"And whom she greets." When further on I say—"Ye Dames, lend me your aid," I indicate those whom it is my intention to address, by calling on these ladies to aid me in doing honour to her. Then when I say—"All gentleness," I repeat what has been said in the first part, having regard to two actions of her mouth, one of which is its most sweet utterance, and the other its wondrous smile. Mark, however, that I do not say of this last how it works within the hearts of others, seeing that the memory can neither retain her smile, nor its effects.

Not many days after this sonnet was written (so it was ordained by that glorious Lord of Heaven, who Himself refused not to undergo death), he who had been the progenitor of all the wondrous perfections which were displayed in that most excelling Beatrice, departed from this life, passing of a surety into eternal glory. Wherefore, forasmuch as such a separation is very grievous unto those friends

who are left behind ; and as, moreover, there is no friendship like that of a good father for a good child, and of a good child for a good father ; and as this lady was pre-eminently good, and her father (as by many is thought, and as in truth he was) was likewise eminently good, it needs not to declare that her grief was most bitter and abounding. And as it is the usage of the aforesaid city at these woeful seasons, that women with women, and men with men, meet together to lament, many ladies repaired to the place where Beatrice bewailed her loss with many tears ; certain of which ladies I saw returning thence, and heard them speak of that most gracious being, and how great was her affliction. And, amongst other themes, I heard them say,—“ Indeed her grief is such, to see her is enough to make one die of pity.” Then these ladies passed on, and I remained in such distress that tears ran down my cheeks, and I had again and again to raise my hands to my eyes to hide them. And had it not been that I hoped to hear more about her (for where I stood the greater proportion of those ladies, as they quitted her, were obliged to pass), I should have withdrawn into some retired place the moment I felt the tears within my eyes. And whilst I lingered in the same spot, some more ladies went by, who said, as they passed along,—“ Which of us that has heard this lady’s words of anguish can ever smile again ?” After these came others, saying, as they passed,—“ Yonder man weeps for all the world as if

he had seen her, as we have done." Anon others spoke thus of me,—“Behold, he is so changed, he seems no longer like himself!” In this wise did I hear these ladies, as they went by, comment on her and on myself; musing whereon, and seeing the occasion to be worthy, I determined to write some lines which should embody all that I had heard these ladies say. And as, but for the fear of provoking their rebuke, I would fain have asked some questions of them, I took occasion to write as though I had actually asked them, and they had answered me. And I composed two sonnets; in the first I put the question which I had longed to ask; in the other I give their answer, adopting what I had heard them say, as though it had fallen from them in reply to my inquiry. The first began—“*Ye, who a semblance.*” The second—“*Art thou the man.*”

YE, who a semblance so dejected wear,
 With downcast eyes, that show your griefs to view,
 Whence do ye come, that in your pallid hue
 The colour of the marble stone you wear?
 Say, have ye seen our lady sweet, her fair
 Meek visage bathed in tears' ungracious dew?
 Speak, ladies, speak! is my heart's whisper true,
 The whisper prompted by your noble air?
 And if ye come where grief such triumph kept,
 Then rest ye with me yet awhile, I pray,
 And hide not from me what her sorrows be;
 For by your eyes I see that you have wept,
 And, changed so sadly, ye retrace your way,
 That my heart trembles such distress to see.

This sonnet divides itself into two parts. In the first, appealing to these ladies, I ask if they come from her, telling them I think they do, because their aspect as they return appears ennobled; in the second I beseech them to speak to me of her: and the second begins at—"And if ye come."

ART thou the man, who hast so often sung
 To us the worth that in our lady lies?
 Thy voice is his full surely, but thy guise
 Proclaims thee of a different lineage sprung.
 Why dost thou weep, with heart so sorely wrung,
 That others look on thee with pitying eyes?
 Say, hast thou seen her weep, and in such wise,
 Thou couldst not hide the grief that to thee clung?
 Leave us to weep, and sadly range along.
 He does a sin who seeks to comfort us;
 For we have heard her in her anguish cry;
 And so deject her look, and piteous,
 That whosoe'er should view such sorrow's wrong,
 Must feel his heart for grief within him die.

This sonnet has four parts, in accordance with the four different ways of speaking of the ladies for whom I make reply. But as, after what has been said above, they are sufficiently obvious, I do not concern myself with expounding the import of the various parts, but merely distinguish them. The second begins at—"Why dost thou weep?" The third at—"Leave us to weep." The fourth—"And so deject her look."

A few days after this it chanced that a most painful infirmity attacked me in a certain part of

my body, which for many days caused me excruciating pain, whereby I was reduced to a state of such extreme weakness that I was unable to move. And I declare that on the ninth day, being in intolerable pain, the thought of my lady stole into my mind. And after I had mused concerning her for some time, my thoughts reverted to my own enfeebled life, and seeing how fleeting it must be, even although it should be unshaken by disease, I began to mourn inwardly at the thought of all this misery. Whereupon, sighing heavily, I said within myself, "It needs must be that the most gentle Beatrice shall die!" and at this thought I was so overwhelmed with dismay, that I closed my eyes, and began to be disquieted like one beside himself, and to see strange visions, as thus:—In the first wanderings of my fancy, there appeared to me the faces of women with dishevelled hair, who said to me, "Thou shalt surely die!" And after these certain other faces appeared to me, which were horrible to behold, and which said to me, "Thou art dead!" My fancy having thus begun to wander, I came at last to such a point that I knew not where I was; and it seemed to me as though I beheld women pass before me weeping, with dishevelled hair, all marvellously sad; and methought I saw the sun darkened, so that the stars were visible; and of a colour that made me think they wept; and methought the birds, as they flew by, fell dead, and that there were mighty earthquakes.

And as I lay wrapt in wonder at these fancies, and grievously afraid, I fancied that a friend came to me and said, "Knowest thou not, thy most excellent lady hath quitted this mortal sphere?" Thereupon I fell to weeping most piteously, and I wept not in imagination only, but with my eyes, bathing them with veritable tears. Then methought I looked up towards heaven, and it seemed to me as though I beheld a multitude of angels, winging their way upwards, and before them they bore a little cloud of exceeding whiteness; these angels, methought, were singing gloriously, and the words of their song, meseemed, were these—"Osanna in excelsis!" and other words than these I did not hear. Thereafter it seemed to me as if my heart, that was so full of love, said to me, "It is true that our lady is dead!" And forthwith, methought, I went to view the body, wherein that most noble and blessed soul had dwelt. And such force had my erring fancy, that it showed me my lady dead; and it seemed to me that women were covering her head with a white veil; and her features wore such an aspect of humility, that they seemed to say, "Now do I behold the beginning of peace!" And therewithal, seeing her thus, an humility so profound came over me, that I called upon death, "Come to me, and deal not churlishly with me, for surely it behoveth thee to be gentle, seeing where thou hast been; come, then, to me, that do desire thee much. Lo, already do I wear thy colour!" And when I

had seen all the mournful mysteries completed which are wont to be performed to the bodies of the dead, methought I returned to my chamber, and, being there, I turned my gaze heavenward ; and so potent was my imagination, that I began to weep and cry aloud, " Oh, most lovely soul, how is he blest who beholds thee !" and as I uttered these words with heavy sobs of anguish, and called upon death to come to me, a young and noble lady who was seated by my couch, thinking that I wept and cried aloud because of the pain of my disorder, was seized with apprehension and began to weep ; whereupon certain other ladies who were in the room perceived that I was weeping, by the tears which they saw her shed, and having led from the room this lady, who was most nearly allied to me by blood, they drew near to wake me, thinking that I dreamt, and told me " to sleep no more, and not to be disquieted." Hearing myself thus addressed, the potent fancy ended, just as I was on the point of saying, " Oh, Beatrice, mayest thou be blessed !" and already had I said, " Oh, Beatrice !" when, recovering myself, I opened my eyes, and saw I had been deceived ; and albeit I had pronounced her name, my voice was so broken by sobs and tears that these ladies could not catch the sound. And albeit I was sorely ashamed, yet upon a certain prompting of love I turned round towards them. And when they saw me, they began to say, " He seems to be dead," and to whisper among

themselves, "Let us endeavour to console him!" Then, having first soothed and comforted me with gentle words, they asked me of what I had been afraid. To which I, being in some measure tranquillised, and conscious of the falsity of my vision, replied, "I will tell you what has ailed me!" Then, beginning at the beginning, I told them all that I had seen, but avoiding all mention of that most gentle lady's name. When afterwards I recovered from this sickness, I resolved to embody this incident in verse, forasmuch as it seemed to me that it would be a thing delectable to hear; and so I composed the following canzone:—

A LADY fair, compassionate, and young,
With all good graces bounteously adorned,
Stood by, where, calling oft on death, I lay;
When she beheld my face with anguish wrung,
And heard the wandering words wherein I mourned,
She wept aloud, so sore was her dismay;
And other ladies, by these sounds of woe
Attracted to the chamber where I lay,
Led her, all tears, away,
Then strove my wildered senses to restore;
And one cried, "Sleep no more!"
Another, "Wherefore dost thou vex thee so?"
Then through the mists of that strange dream I broke,
And, calling on my lady's name, awoke.

So mournful were the accents from me came,
And broken so with sobs and sighs, that I
Alone within my heart did know that sound;
And, with a visage all abashed with shame,
Which to my cheek had sent its blushing dye,

Touched by their gentle love, I turned me round,
So wan and worn, that, seeing me, they found
Sad images of death around them spread.
"Oh, soothe this weary head!"
So whispered each to each in accents soft;
And they did ask me oft,
"What has unmanned thee so with direful stound?"
And when I had somehow been comforted,
"Ladies, I'll tell you what I saw!" I said.

Whilst I lay musing on my life's decay,
And saw how frail it was, how brief its span,
Love wept within my heart, where he doth lie;
For that my soul was struck with such dismay,
As o'er my thought the sad reflection ran,
That all too surely should my lady die.
Then was I smitten with such agony,
That mine eyes closed, weighed down with dark despair,
And so affrighted were
My spirits, that they all turned round in flight;
And then, reft of the light
Of knowledge and of truth, in fancy's eye
Women I saw, that moaned along the air,
"Thou'rt dead!" and "Thou shalt die!" and rested ne'er.

Next many a strange and doubtful shape of woe
I saw, whilst through that idle dream I went.
I seemed to be I knew not where, and see
Ladies dishevelled, wandering to and fro,
Some weeping, and some uttering loud lament,
That to my soul shot burning agony.
Then slowly grew the sun, as seemed to me,
Dark and more dark, and Love's star showed its head,
And tears by both were shed;
Birds, flying through the air, fell to the ground,
And the earth quaked around,
And a man hailed me, wan, with tottering knee,

"How now ! hast thou not heard the news ?" he said,
"Thy lady, she who was so fair, is dead."

I raised my eyes, with tears that drownèd were,
And lo ! the angels, like a shower of manna,
Streaming away to heaven ! and as they soar,
A little cloudlet they before them bear,
And, as they followed, still they cried, "Hosannah !"
More would I tell you, had they uttered more.
Then said Love, "All shall pass thine eyes before !
Come, see our lady, where in death she lies."
Imagination's fantasies
Then took me, where I saw my lady dead.
And, when with her I had my gazing fed,
Some ladies drew a scarf the body o'er ;
And on her face was perfect calm expressed,
That seemed as though it said, "I am at rest !"

Then in my grief I grew so meek of mind,
Seeing in her a meekness so serene,
That I exclaimed, "Oh, Death, I hold thee sweet,
Since thou hast with my dearest lady been.
Thou shouldst be deemed a gentle thing and kind ;
Pity, and not disdain, for thee were meet ;
See, I so long to thy abodes to fleet,
I am as one that for his bier is dressed.
Come ! hear my soul's behest !"
Then went I forth, with sigh and heavy moan ;
And when I was alone,
I said, and looked to heaven, her blessèd seat,
"Oh, beauteous soul, who seeth thee is blest !"
Even then you woke me from that dream's unrest.

This canzone has two parts. In the first, addressing some undefined person, I state how I was roused out of a fantastic dream by certain ladies, and how I

promised to recount it to them. The second begins at—"Whilst I lay musing." The first part has two divisions. In the first of these I set forth what certain ladies, and one especially, said and did during my trance, and before I returned to complete consciousness; in the second I state what these ladies said to me when I had shaken off this hallucination, beginning at the words—"So mournful were the accents." When further on I say—"Whilst I lay musing," I recount what I had beheld in my vision precisely as I recounted it to them. And this part of the poem, again, has two divisions; in the first I record the vision in the order in which it presented itself; in the second, after stating the precise time when they recalled me to my senses, I conclude by thanking them; and this latter part begins at—"Even then you woke me."

Soon after I had seen this vision, one day, as I sat musing in a certain spot, I felt a sudden trembling at my heart, precisely as though I had been in that lady's presence. Straightway Love appeared to me in a vision, and meseemed as if he came from where my lady dwelt, and a voice seemed to cry joyously within my heart, "Take heed thou bless the day when first I mastered thee, for in sooth thou oughtest so to do." And indeed so joyful was my heart within me, that it seemed as though it could not be my heart, so unlike it was to what it had erewhile been. And shortly after these words, which my heart had spoken to me with

the tongue of Love, I saw coming towards me a lady, who was renowned for her beauty, and of whom he whom I have already spoken of as foremost of my friends had long been enamoured. And the name of this lady was Giovanna, but because of her beauty, as some opine, she had been called Primavera (Spring), and by that name she went. And as I looked towards her I saw Beatrice, that fair wonder, advancing behind her; these ladies passed by where I stood, each close to the other, and it seemed to me that Love spoke within my heart, and said, "This lady is called Primavera solely because of her coming here to-day; for it was I who first moved him, who first gave her that name, to call her 'Primavera,' that is *prima verra* ('who shall come first'), on the day when Beatrice shall first appear to her faithful subject after his vision; and if thou wilt consider her first name, it is tantamount to calling her Primavera, since her name Giovanna is derived from that Giovanni (John) who preceded the true light, saying, '*Ego vox clamantis in deserto, Parate viam Domini.*' (I am as the voice of one that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord!)" Methought, moreover, he said to me these other things. "Whosoever should consider this matter curiously would call yonder Beatrice Love, for the great resemblance which she bears to me." Reflecting upon this I determined to write of it in rhyme to my foremost friend (passing over in silence certain expressions

which it seemed fitting to omit), believing as I did that his heart still beat as warmly as ever in admiration of the beauty of this sweet Primavera; and so I composed this sonnet:—

I FELT within my heart a sudden war
 Of fancies sweet, which slumbering there had been,
 And then I saw Love coming from afar;
 Yet hardly knew him, all so blithe his mien.
 "Now do me honour meet!" did he exclaim;
 And smiles were clustered round his every word;
 Some little space I stood beside my lord,
 When, looking towards the quarter whence he came,
 I saw the Lady Vanna, side by side
 With Lady Bice—each a miracle—
 To where we stood, advancing smilingly.
 Then Love to me, as I stood wondering, cried,
 "This maid is Spring!" his words I noted well,
 "That Love is called, she so resembles me."

This sonnet has many parts. The first states how I felt the accustomed tremor awakened within my heart, and how Love appeared to me far off, all radiant with joy. The second states what Love seemeth to whisper within my heart, and in what mood he seemed to be. The third mentions certain things which I heard and saw, after he had been for some time beside me. The second part begins at—"Now do me honour meet!" The third at—"Some little space." The third part has two divisions; in the first of which I state what I saw, beginning at—"Then Love to me."

Here now might one who is worthy to have all his doubts resolved be inclined to pause and make question as to the way in which I speak of Love, as if he were

a thing subsisting by himself, and not merely an intelligent, but a corporeal substance, which proposition, in strict truth, is false; for Love is not, so to speak, an independent substance, but is an accident in substance. Yet that I speak of him as though he were a body, yea, as though he were a man, appears by three things which I say of him. I say that I saw him coming from afar, wherefore, forasmuch as to come expresses change of place (and body alone, according to the philosopher, has the power to pass from place to place), it is clear that I assume Love to be corporeal. Again, I say that he smiled, and also that he spoke, things which are both, and especially the power to smile, peculiarly the attributes of man; and therefore it is clear that I assume him to be human. To explain this point, so far as is meet for our present purpose, it must in the first place be understood, that of old there were no writers on Love in the vulgar tongue, whilst, however, there were poets who wrote on Love in the Latin tongue. Amongst ourselves, I say (and the same thing may have happened among other nations, and happens still), just as in Greece, it was not poets of the common sort, but only men of learning and culture, who treated of such matters. Nor have many years gone by since these poets in the vulgar tongue first appeared; for writing in rhyme in the vulgar tongue is very much the same thing as writing in verse in Latin; and as a proof how short the time is, if we will only make research in the languages of OC and SI, we shall find nothing written on this theme one hun-

dred and fifty years before the present epoch ; and the reason why certain illiterate persons acquired some reputation as writers is, that they were the first who wrote in the language of SL. And the man who first began to write poetry in the vulgar tongue was moved thereto by the wish to make his verses understood by his lady, who would have found it hard to comprehend Latin verses. And this operates against those who rhyme on other topics than Love, inasmuch as that mode of composition was from the first invented merely for discourse of Love ; wherefore, forasmuch as greater licence of discourse is permitted to poets than to writers in prose, and as these writers in rhyme are exclusively writers in the vulgar tongue, it is fit and reasonable that greater licence of speech be allowed to them than to other writers in the vulgar tongue ; consequently, whatever figure or colour of rhetoric is allowable to the poets, is also allowable to those who write in rhyme. If, then, we see that the poets have spoken to inanimate things as if they had sense and reason, and have made them hold converse with each other, and not only real things, but things that are not real (as, for example, in making things speak which have no existence, and accidents discourse as though they were substances and human beings), it is only meet that the writer in rhyme should do the like, not indeed without regard to reason, but in conformity with such reason as he may be afterwards able to expound in prose. That the poets have spoken in this wise is manifest from that passage in Virgil (Æneid, Book I.) where Juno, a

goddess hostile to the Trojans, speaks to Æolus the god of the winds, "ÆOLE, NAMQUE TIBI," &c., and he replies to her, "TUUS, O REGINA QUID OPTES," &c. The same poet (Æneid, Book III.) makes the inanimate address the animate thus, "DARDANIDÆ DURI," &c. In Lucan the animate address the inanimate, "MULTUM, ROMA, TAMEN DEBES CIVILIBUS ARMIS." In Horace man speaks to his own art, as to a third person; and the words are not only those of Horace, but he speaks them as the medium of the divine Homer,— "DIC MIHI, MUSA, VIRUM," &c. (Ars Poetica.) Ovid (Remedium Amoris, Book I.) makes Love speak as if he were a human being, "BELLA MIHI, VIDEO, BELLA PARANTUR, AIT." By these examples, any one who is at a loss in any part of this little book of mine may have his doubts cleared up. But that no gross-witted person may assume too wide a licence, I say, that even as the poets do not use this mode of speech without regard to reason, neither ought those who rhyme to write as if they had no rational purpose in what they write; for it were great shame to any man, who, having rhymed on any theme under the garb of some figure or colour of rhetoric, should be unable, when required, to denude his language of that garb so as to unveil his real meaning. That foremost friend of mine and I could point to several who rhyme in this absurd manner.

That excellent lady, of whom I spake in what is before written, became an object of so much interest, that, as she passed along the street, people ran

to catch a sight of her—a circumstance which gave me wonderful delight ; and when she drew near to any one, a feeling of reverence so profound came over his heart, that he had no courage either to raise his eyes, or to return her salute ; and of this many who have felt it could bear witness to such as doubt. But she, crowned and clothed with humility, pursued her way, testifying no triumph in what she saw and heard. Many, as she went by, exclaimed, “This is not a woman, but one of the fairest of heaven’s angels !” Others, “Behold a miracle ! Blessed be the Lord in that He hath wrought so marvellously !” I say, her demeanour was so full of grace and dignity and every charm, that, looking upon her, men felt within them an emotion of inexpressible sweetness and elevation ; nor was it possible for any one to look upon her, but straightway a sigh rose from his breast. These and even more marvellous effects were wrought by her in a manner at once most strange and admirable ; much meditating whereon, and wishing to resume my verses in her praise, I determined to express in words something of her wondrous and excelling influence, in order that not only those who had beheld her in the flesh, but others, might know what of her fair perfections might be conveyed in words. Thereupon I composed this sonnet :—

So kind, so full of gentle courtesy,
My lady’s greeting is, that every tongue
To silence thrills, and eyes, that on her hung

With mute observance, dare no more to see.
 Onwards she moves, clothed with humility,
 Hearing, with look benign, her praises rung ;
 A being, seeming sent from heaven among
 Mankind, to show what heavenly wonders be.
 Within her looks such stores of pleasure lie,
 That through the gazer's eye creeps to his heart
 A sweetness must be tasted to be known ;
 And from his lips, with love in every tone,
 A spirit soft and gentle seems to part,
 Which to the soul keeps saying, " Sigh ! oh sigh ! "

This sonnet is so easy to understand by what has been already said that it needs no division, and therefore, leaving it, I say :—

This lady of my heart came to be so highly esteemed, that not only was she honoured and commended, but many others came through her to be honoured and commended also. Which I seeing, and desiring to make known to those who did not see it, I determined to write something in which it should be expressed. So I wrote the following sonnet, which tells how her influence extended itself over other ladies :—

HE fully sees her matchless worth, who sees
 That lady mine, with other ladies round.
 They whom she chooses for her mates are bound
 To render thanks to Heaven with grateful knees.
 Such virtue rare her beauty hath, in sooth,
 No envy stirs in other ladies' breast,
 But in its light they walk beside her, dressed
 In gentleness, and love, and noble truth.

Her looks whate'er they light on seem to bless,
Nor her alone make lovely to the view,
But all her peers through her have honour too:
In all she does such gracious gentleness,
No one can think of her, but at the thought
He breathes a sigh, with love's own sweetness fraught.

This sonnet has three parts. In the first I state among what persons this lady appeared most admirable; in the second how sweet it was to be in her company; in the third I speak of the influence she exerted upon others. The second begins at—"They whom she chooses for her mates." The third at—"Such virtue rare." The last part has three divisions. In the first I state her influence on ladies, through their own faculties; in the second her influence upon her through others; in the third I state her influence not only on ladies, but on every one, and how wondrous was that influence, not merely whilst in her presence, but from the mere remembrance of her. The second begins at—"Her looks, whate'er they look on." The third at—"In all she does."

Thereafter, on a day, I began to reflect on what I had said of my lady in the two preceding sonnets, and perceiving that I had not spoken of what was then at work within me, it seemed to me as though I had spoken of her imperfectly; and therefore I resolved to write something in which I should express how I seemed to be disposed towards her influence, and how it acted upon me. And not

thinking that this could be told within the limits of a sonnet, I began this canzone :—

So long has Love enchain'd me as his thrall,
 And so accustomed to his empery,
 That, tyrannous as at first he seem'd to me,
 Now on my heart his rigours sweetly fall.
 So, when by him my better parts are all
 Thrown down, and seems as every power would flee,
 Even then so great my soul's sweet ecstasy,
 My trembling cheeks grow pale as funeral-pall.
 Then Love within me gathers might apace,
 Making my sighs in words proclaim their woe,
 And calling on my lady forth they go,
 Entreating her to take me to her grace :
 Thus still it chanceth, when she looks on me,
 And none might deem how humbled then I be.

*Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo ! facta est quasi vidua gentium.** I was engaged upon this canzone, and had just completed the above stanza, when the Lord of Justice summoned that most gracious being to triumph under the banner of Mary, the blessed Queen of Heaven, whose name was ever had in deepest reverence by the lips of that sainted Beatrice. And albeit it might not be unpleasing to discourse here of her departure from amongst us, it is not my intention to do so for three reasons. The first is, that this is not pertinent to my present purpose, as may be seen from the introduction

* How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people ! she is become as a widow, she that was great among the nations.—*Lamentations*, i. 1.

to this little book ; the second is, that even although it were pertinent to my purpose, my pen would be inadequate to treat of it, as were befitting ; the third is, that, granting that neither of these considerations existed, the subject is no fitting one for me, seeing that I could not treat of it without becoming my own panegyrist (a thing most culpable in him that does it), and therefore I leave this subject to some other chronicler. Nevertheless, as on several occasions in the preceding pages the number nine has occupied a place, and apparently not without significance ; and as in her decease that number would seem to have filled an important place, it may be right to say something here, which seems to be not irrelevant to the matter in hand. First, then, I will remark how it had a place in her decease, and then I will indicate a reason why this number was so propitious to her. I say, then, that, according to the computation used in Italy, her most noble spirit departed hence in the first hour of the ninth day of the month ; and, according to the computation used in Syria, she died in the ninth month of the year, for there the first month is Tismim, which is our October. And, according to our computation, she died in that year of our calendar (that year of our Lord, to wit) in which the perfect number was nine times completed, within that century wherein she was born into the world, she being a Christian of the thirteenth century. Why this number was so pro-

pitious to her may possibly be explained thus. According to Ptolemy, and according to Christian truth, the heavens that move are nine, and, according to the commonly received belief among astrologers, these heavens exert a concurrent influence on mundane things, each according to its peculiar position; so this number was propitious to her, indicating, as it did, that at her birth all the nine moving heavens were in the most perfect conjunction. This is one reason; but when the matter is scanned more closely, and in conformity with infallible truth, this number was her very self. I speak by way of similitude, meaning thus:—The number three is the root of nine, because without any other number, multiplied by itself, it makes nine, it being obvious that three times three make nine. If, then, three is by itself the author of nine, and the author of miracles is in Himself three, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, which are Three and One, this lady was accompanied by the number nine, in order to show that she was a Nine, in other words a miracle, whose only root is the adorable Trinity. A person more subtly-minded than myself might peradventure see some more subtle reason, but this is what I see in the matter, and it is what pleases me best.

After that most gracious lady had quitted this our sphere, the aforesaid city was left, as it were, utterly widowed and despoiled of all its worth; wherefore I, still drowned in tears within this de-

solate city, wrote to the princes of the earth touching its condition, taking for my exordium those words of Jeremiah :—*Quomodo sedet sola civitas !* And I mention this, that no marvel may be felt at my having cited these words already, as a kind of prelude to the new matter which follows anon. And should any rebuke me for not writing here the words which follow those above cited, my excuse is, that from the first my purpose was to write only in the vulgar tongue ; and as the words which so follow are all Latin, it would be contrary to my purpose to have transcribed them ; and I know that my friend, to whom I write this, is of the like mind, to wit, that I should write to him exclusively in the vulgar tongue. When my eyes had for some term been bathed in tears, and were so weary that I could no longer give vent to my grief in weeping, I thought to find an outlet for it in some words of dole ; and I therefore resolved to indite a canzone, in which I should tearfully discourse of her, excessive grief for whom had destroyed my spirit ; and I begin with the lines,—“ *The eyes that mourn,*” &c. In order that this canzone may after its close retain an aspect more widowed and forlorn, I will explain its divisions before writing it down ; and this method I will pursue henceforward to the end.

This poor little canzone, then, has three parts. The first is introductory ; in the second I speak of her ; in the third I address the canzone in a plaintive strain.

The second begins at—"Yes, Beatrice is gone to yonder heaven." The third at—"My plaintive song." The first part has three divisions. In the first of these I state why I am moved to speak; in the second I state to whom I wish to speak; in the third I state of whom I wish to speak. The second begins at—"And now, remembering." The third at—"And, weeping, still of her." When further on I say,— "Yes, Beatrice is gone," I speak of her, and in this part make two divisions; in the first of which I express the cause why she was taken away; and, next, how her departure is bewailed by others, and this part commences at—"Forth from the lovely habitation." This part has three divisions. In the first I speak of those who do not mourn for her; in the second of those who do; and in the third I speak of my own condition. The second begins at—"But sadness him assails." The third at—"With deepest anguish." When further on I say, "My plaintive song," I address my song, pointing out what ladies it is to go to, and to stay withal.

THE eyes that mourn in pity of the heart,
Such pain have suffered from their ceaseless tears,
That they are utterly subdued at last;
And would I still the ever-gnawing smart,
That down to death is leading all my years,
Forth in wild sobs must I my misery cast;
And now remembering how, in days gone past,
To you, sweet ladies, gladly I addressed
My speech of that dear lady mine, while she
Yet lived, I'll urge my plea

To none save gentle heart in ladies' breast,—
And, weeping, still of her my song shall be,
Who suddenly to heaven hath ta'en her flight,
And left Love with me here, a mournful wight.

Yes, Beatrice is gone to yonder heaven,
To realms where angels dwell and are in peace ;
You, ladies, hath she left with them to stay.
She was not hence, like other mortals, riven
By chill, or calenture, or such disease,
But for her mighty worth alone was borne away ;
For her meek nature shed so bright a ray,
It beamed to heaven, and with a light so blest,
As woke amaze in the Eternal Sire,
And kindled sweet desire
To call a soul so lovely to His rest.
Then made He it from earth to Him aspire,
Deeming this life of care and sorrowing
Unworthy of so fair and pure a thing.

Forth from the lovely habitation, where
Supreme in grace it dwelt, her soul is gone,
And in a worthy place shines starry-bright.
He who can speak of her, nor weep, doth bear
Within his breast a worthless heart of stone,
Where no benignant influence e'er can light.
The grovelling heart could never gain such height,
As to imagine aught of her, and so
It ne'er is moved by the desire to weep.
But sadness him assails, and yearning deep
In sighs and burning tears to vent his woe,
And o'er his soul a black despair doth creep,
Who hath, yea even in thought, at any time
Seen what she was, and how we lost her in her prime.

With deepest anguish is my bosom rent,
When rushes to my mind the thought of her,
Who in my heart doth hold the chiefest place,
And ofttime, when my thoughts on death are bent,
A wish so sweet doth then within me stir,
That death's pale hue mounts up into my face ;
And, wrapt in fancy thus, such pain apace
Doth o'er each nerve and trembling fibre run,
As breaks the dream, that makes my sorrow less ;
And such my sore distress,
That all for shame my fellow-men I shun ;
Then, weeping lonely in my wretchedness,
I call on Beatrice, "Oh, thou art dead !"
And, calling so on her, am comforted.

Such tears and sighs and wailing and dismay
Break from my heavy heart, when none is near,
As none might hear, nor be with sorrow wrung ;
And what my life has been since that sad day,
When my dear lady sought a brighter sphere,
May never be expressed by mortal tongue.
This, ladies, you to whom I oft have sung,
What now I am, I cannot fitly speak.
So wasted in my misery I be,
My whole heart struck from out me utterly,
That every man who sees my deathlike cheek,
Seems as he said, " I will not aught with thee !"
But what I am my lady doth regard,
And still from her I hope for my reward !

My plaintive song, take now thy mournful way,
And find the dames and damosels, to whom
Thy sisters, joyful-gay,
Were wont to bear the light of sunny gladness,
And thou, distressful daughter of my sadness,
Go thou and dwell with them in cheerless gloom !

After this canzone was written there came to me one, who, according to the degrees of friendship, was my friend next in order after my first,—one connected by the nearest ties of blood with that glorious being. After some converse, he besought me to write for him something concerning a lady who was dead, and he so dissembled his words that he seemed to speak of another lady, who was but lately dead ; wherefore I, perceiving that it was of that blessed saint, and none other, that he spoke, told him it should be done, even as he besought. So, when I came afterwards to meditate thereon, I resolved to write a sonnet, in which I should give vent to my own grief, and, giving it to my friend, it should thus seem as though I had composed it with reference to him. Then I wrote—“*Come, oh ye gentle hearts,*” &c.

This sonnet has two parts. In the first I call on the liege subjects of Love to give ear to me ; in the second I discourse of my own miserable state. The second begins at—“Sighs, which from my heart’s,” &c.

COME, oh ye gentle hearts, that hear my cry,
 And listen to the sighs, for pity’s sake,
 Which from my heart’s sore desolation break ;
 Sighs, but for which I must with anguish die !
 For oftentimes mine eyes rebel, when I,
 Wearied with mourning for my lady so,
 Long for a stream of blessed tears to flow,
 And ease the griefs that in my bosom lie.
 Oft will you hear my prayer sent up to her,
 That noble lady mine, who to a sphere

Deserving of her worth hath turned away,
Blent with dispraises of this life's vile stir,
Breathed by a sorrowing soul, that lingers here,
Abandonèd of that which was its stay.

After I had written this sonnet, reflecting to whom I meant to give it, as a thing coming from himself, it struck me that it was a poor and barren tribute to one so closely allied to that glorious being; and, therefore, before giving it to him, I wrote two stanzas of a canzone, the one as if really spoken by him, and the other by myself, although by a careless observer both might probably be thought to be spoken by the same person. But whoever observes them narrowly will see that two different persons speak; inasmuch as the one does not style her, "*My Lady*," whereas the other very plainly does. This canzone I gave him along with the foregoing sonnet, telling him I had composed them for himself alone.

This canzone begins—"Alas ! whenever I ;" and has two parts. In the one—the first stanza, to wit—this dear friend of mine, who was so closely allied to her, pours forth his lamentation ; whilst I make my lament in the second stanza, beginning—"Mingled with all my sobs." And thus it is apparent that in this canzone two persons make lament ; one mourning like a brother, the other like a liege lover.

ALAS ! whenever I recall the thought,
That never more I may

Behold the lady whom I so lament,
Then in my heart of hearts such grief is wrought,
That, by my passion rent,
I cry—"Oh, why, my soul, here longer stay?"
For lo, the pangs which thou shalt bear alway,
In this vile world, to thee so full of woes,
Fill me with fears, and sadden all my breath!
Then do I call on Death
To lap me in his soft and sweet repose,
And say, "Oh, come to me!" with love so deep,
That I, when others die, with envy weep.

Mingled with all my sobs a wailing dim
Is heard, that day and night
Calls evermore on Death, with piteous swell.
My every hope and wish is turned to him,
Since my sweet lady fell,
Crushed in her prime by his remorseless might:
Because her gracious beauty, from our sight
Transported far, on high is beaming now
With spiritual radiance, so divine,
That all the heaven doth shine
With love's own light, to which the angels bow,
Wondering, with their calm eyes profound and clear,
To see such gentle grace sprung from our mortal sphere.

On the day which completed the year wherein
this lady became a denizen of the life everlasting, I
was sitting in a certain place, and, as my memory
wandered back to her, I sketched an angel on my
tablets; and, as I drew, turning round, I saw beside
me some gentlemen, to whom I was bound to give
courteous salutation, and they were taking note of
what I did; and, as I was afterwards told, they had

been there for some time before I was aware of them. When I saw them, I arose, and, saluting them, said :—"Another was with me even now, and therefore was I musing." And when they took their leave, I resumed my occupation, the designing, to wit, of figures of angels ; in doing which I bethought me to write some verses, as a kind of anniversary memorial of her, addressing them to the gentlemen who had just left me. Upon this I wrote the following sonnet, beginning—"Into my lonely thought," which has two beginnings, in reference to both of which, therefore, I will divide it.

Taking the first beginning, this sonnet has three parts. In the first I state that this lady was in my thoughts ; in the second I state how Love wrought within me in consequence ; in the third I speak of the effects of Love. The second begins at—"Love felt her gentle presence." The third at—"Forth from my heart." This part has two divisions. In the one I state that all my sighs had a voice as they issued forth ; in the other I show how some gave utterance to words different from what were spoken by the others. The second begins at—"But they which came." The same division applies, if the other beginning be taken, except that in the first part I mention the time when this lady came into my mind, which I do not mention in the other.

FIRST BEGINNING.

INTO my lonely thought that noble dame
Had come, who for her matchless excellence

Was by the Most High Lord transported hence
To where in heaven dwells Mary, blessed name !

SECOND BEGINNING.

INTO my lonely thought that noble dame,
Whom Love bewails, had entered in the hour,
When you, my friends, attracted by his power,
To see the task that did employ me, came.
Love felt her gentle presence in my brain,
And straight in my distracted heart he woke :
“Go forth, go forth !” Thus to my sighs he spoke,
And they went forth, a lamentable train.
Forth from my heart with sounds of wail they rolled,
Such sounds as oftentimes with their dismal close
Bring tears of anguish into these sad eyes.
But they which came with sharpest pang were those
Which said, “Oh, intellect of noble mould,
A year to-day it is since thou didst seek the skies !”

Some time afterwards, happening to be in a certain spot which reminded me of times past, I fell into a reverie ; and so sad were my thoughts, that they gave to my aspect an appearance of terrible distress. Wherefore, being conscious how woe-begone I looked, I lifted my eyes to see if I was observed, and beheld a lady at a window, young and of surpassing beauty, whose eyes were bent upon me with an expression of such profound compassion, that the very quintessence of pity seemed to be concentrated in her ; whereupon, forasmuch as the wretched, when they see how others grieve for them, are themselves more readily moved to tears, as though in pity for themselves, so I straight-

way felt my eyes fill with tears. On this, not to let my abject state be seen, I went out of this lady's sight ; and afterwards I said within myself, " It cannot be but this compassionate lady should have a loving and most noble nature." And thereupon I resolved to write a sonnet, in which I should speak to her, and in which should be comprised all that I have just mentioned ; and as its import is sufficiently clear, I will not subdivide it.

LADY, these eyes of mine have seen of late
What depth of pity gathered on thy cheek,
Marking the troubled mien, and eyes that speak
The anguish which is evermore my mate.
Then well I knew thy thoughts were of my fate,
And of the cloud that darkens all my days,
And so mine eyes I did not dare to raise,
As fearing they might show my vile estate.
And in my heart thy look did so prevail,
That in mine eyes I felt the rising tears,
And from thy presence tore myself away.
Then in my soul I said, with trembling fears,
" Sure with this lady dwells that Love to-day,
Which sends me mourning forth with such sad wail !"

It so happened that whenever I saw this lady her face was full of pity, and pale, as if with love ; so that I was constantly reminded of that most noble lady of my soul, who was wont to be of the like hue. And often, often, when unable to weep or find a vent for my sorrow, I went to see this compassionate lady, who merely by her looks seemed to be able to draw tears from my eyes. Thus a

fresh desire awoke within me to write some lines addressed to her ; and I composed this sonnet, beginning—" *Never was Pity's semblance ;*" which is intelligible from the foregoing narrative without any subdivision.

NEVER was Pity's semblance or Love's hue,
So wondrously in face of lady shown,
That tenderly gave ear to sorrow's moan,
Or looked on woeful eyes, as shows in you.
What time my sorrow-stricken cheek you view
Grow pale before you, to my mind you bring
So sad remembrance of a certain thing,
I strongly fear my heart will rend in two.
I cannot choose but that my wasted eyes
Should gaze on you again, and yet again,
So longingly they yearn to vent their grief :
And you increase their wish for such relief,
They pine and waste away with longings vain,
But in your presence not a tear will rise.

The sight of this lady had such an effect upon me, that my eyes began to take too much delight in beholding her, wherefore was I ofttime inwardly disquieted, and regarded myself with somewhat of contempt ; and ever and anon I cursed the fickleness of my eyes, saying to them in my thought, " You were wont aforetime to bring tears to the eyes of all who witnessed your woeful state ; yet now it seems as though you would forget your misery because a lady looks at you, yet does so only in sorrowful remembrance of that glorious being, for whom you are wont to mourn. But do

your uttermost, I care not ; for ever and anon will I recall her to your remembrance, accursed eyes, which never, save in death, should have withheld the tribute of your tears !” And when I had thus inwardly addressed my eyes, straightway I was assailed by sighs, very heavy and full of anguish ; and in order that this inward strife might not remain unknown, save to the wretched man who felt it, I resolved to compose a sonnet which should express my pitiable state, and I wrote that beginning—“ *The bitter tears.*”

This sonnet has two parts. In the first I speak to my eyes, in the same strain in which my heart spoke within myself ; in the second I remove an obscurity, by showing who it is that speaks, and this part begins at—“ So speaks my heart.” Many more subdivisions might be made, but these are rendered unnecessary by the explanations already given.

“ THE bitter tears which you, poor eyes, have wept,
 For now this many a day, as you have seen,
 Have tears of pity drawn from others’ eyne.
 Meseems as now in you the memory slept,
 Or fain would sleep, of *her*,—if I deceived,
 So traitor-like, the faith to which I swore,
 And ceased not to disturb you evermore,
 Remembering you of her, for whom you grieved.
 Fickle ye are, and vain, which works me care,
 And gives me such alarm, I greatly dread
 The earnest gazing of a lady’s eyes.
 Except in death, and its oblivion, ne’er
 Should you forget your lady, who is dead !”
 So speaks my heart to me, and then it sighs.

The sight of this lady so entirely changed me, that my thoughts often dwelt upon her too fondly ; and I mused about her thus :—" This is a lady, noble, lovely, young, and sage, and it may be that Love has thrown her in my way to the end my life may find peace." And frequently my thoughts took a fonder turn—so much so, that my heart lent its sanction to the dictates of my understanding. But when my heart had done so, reason, on further thoughts, resumed its mastery within me, and I said within myself, " Alas ! what thought is this that seeks to comfort me in so vile a sort, and scarcely leaves me power to think of anything beside ? " Then came another thought, and said, " Thou, who through Love hast been in such heavy tribulation, why keepest thou not aloof from what is so fraught with bitterness ? Thou seest this is an inspiration which kindles within thee the desires of Love, and emanates from nothing less fair than the eyes of that lady who has testified such pity for thy state." After I had in this wise, again and again, disputed within myself, I felt a desire to write something upon the subject ; and as in the foregoing conflict the thoughts which pleaded for that lady had been victorious, I deemed it meet to address my lines to her, and I composed this sonnet, beginning—" *Lady, a gentle thought ;*" and I used the epithet " gentle," as having reference to that gentle lady, otherwise its use would be most villanous.

I divide this sonnet into two parts, to correspond

with the division of my thoughts into two. The one part I call "heart," that is, desire; the other "soul," that is, reason; and I set forth how the one speaks to the other. And that it is right to call desire "heart," and reason "soul," is plain enough to those to whom I care it should be so. True it is, that in the preceding sonnet I set the heart in opposition to the eyes, which seems to run counter to what I say in the present one; and therefore I say that in that sonnet, also, by heart I mean desire, seeing that I longed more to dwell upon the remembrance of that most gentle lady mine than to see this other, albeit I was not altogether indifferent to her either; whence it follows that what is spoken in the one case is not inconsistent with what was spoken in the other. This sonnet has three parts. In the first I set out by telling this lady how all my desires incline towards her; in the second I say how my soul—that is, my reason—speaks to my heart, that is, my desire; in the third I give its answer. The second begins at—"Thus with my heart." The third at—"The heart replies."

LADY, a gentle thought, which speaks of you,
Oft steals into the chambers of my brain,
And reasons there of love in so sweet strain,
That with its faith it doth my heart imbue.
Thus with my heart my soul doth parley:—"Who
Is this that brings such comfort to our pain,
And such ascendancy doth o'er us gain;
She leaves no thought that brings not her to view?"
The heart replies:—"Oh soul that woeful art,
This is from Love a spirit newly sent,

That unto me his lord's high mandate shows.
Yea, and his life, and all the power he owes,
Spring from the eyes of her—that gentle heart—
Whose bosom with the pangs of ours was rent.”

To battle with this adversary of reason, a strong imagination rose up within me one day about the hour of nine. Methought I saw yonder glorious Beatrice arrayed in the same crimson robe in which she had originally appeared to my eyes, and she seemed as youthful as on the day I saw her first. Thereupon I fell to musing about her, and traversing in remembrance step by step all the story of the past, my heart began to repent itself with anguish of the desire wherewith it had for some days so basely suffered itself to be possessed, in defiance of the constancy of reason ; and having shaken off this unworthy desire, all my thoughts reverted to their most gentle Beatrice. And from that time forth, I protest, my heart, whensoever I thought of her, was so overcome with shame, that many a time it broke forth in sighs ; which well-nigh all gave voice, as they took their way, to what was the meditation of my heart,—that most gracious lady's name, to wit,—and how she had departed from amongst us. And it often happened, that all my thoughts were so surcharged with grief, that I became insensible to them, yea, even unconscious where I was. Through this rekindling of my sighs, the desire to weep, which had for awhile been appeased, broke forth anew within me with such force,

that my eyes seemed, as it were, to have no wish at all save only to weep ; and it often happened that from long-continued weeping they were encircled with a purple hue, as though they had undergone the martyr's pangs. Thus is it manifest that they received the fitting guerdon of their fickleness, and to such purpose that, thenceforward, look upon them who might with intent to lure them into like inconstancy, they were blind to the attraction. Wherefore, being anxious that my unworthy desire and vain temptation should be seen to be so completely put to rout, that no doubt should be created on that head by the verses which I had previously written, I determined to compose a sonnet, in which I should comprise the substance of what has been told above, and thereupon I wrote — "*Alas ! alas ! through force of many sighs.*"

I wrote "Alas !" to show the shame I felt in that my eyes had so strayed from their allegiance. This sonnet I do not divide, as its meaning is sufficiently clear.

ALAS ! alas ! through force of many sighs,
That of sad thoughts within the heart are bred,
Mine eyes are vanquished, and of power are shorn,
To meet the gaze of one they else might prize.
But two desires they show, such are they grown,
To weep and image grief ; and so they mourn,
That Love, beholding all the tears they shed,
Oft wreathes them with the martyr's purple crown.
The sighs I heave, and thoughts so woeful drear,
To such keen anguish grow within my breast,

That Love, through sore affliction, swoons away ;
For on these sighs, and all that woeful cheer,
Is my dear lady's sweetest name impressed,
And of her death a long and piteous lay !

After this time of trouble, and in the days when much people were on their way to view that blessed semblance of Himself, which Jesus Christ left us as an exemplar of that most comely countenance of His, whereon my lady now looks in glory, it befell that sundry pilgrims passed along a street which runs nearly through the centre of the city wherein that most gracious lady was born, lived, and died ; and methought their demeanour, as they moved along, showed them to be wrapt in meditation. Musing upon their aspect, therefore, I said within myself, "These pilgrims come belike from some far country, and have not, I ween, heard that lady spoken of ; nay, are wholly ignorant concerning her. Yea, doubtless their thoughts are of other matters, peradventure of their distant friends, whom we know not." Then said I within myself, "Sure I am that were they of some neighbouring district they would show some signs of disquietude in passing through the midst of this sorrow-stricken city. Could I," I continued, "have speech with them for awhile, of a surety I would make them weep before they quitted this city, for the words which I would speak would draw tears from all who hear them." So when they had passed out of sight, I determined to write a sonnet in which I should

give utterance to what I had said within myself; and in order to give it a more plaintive air, I resolved to speak as though I were addressing them, and I composed the sonnet beginning—" *Tell me, ye pilgrims.*"

I used the word "pilgrims" in its broadest sense, for it may be understood in two ways, one broad and the other narrow. Broad, inasmuch as whosoever is out of his own country is a pilgrim; narrow, when it is meant to apply exclusively to one who is going to or returning from the shrine of St James. At the same time it is to be observed that those who are bound on the service of the Most High are appropriately distinguished in three ways. Those are styled "Palmeres" who go beyond the seas, whence they often bring back the palm with them; those are styled "Pilgrims" who go to the shrine of Galicia, for the burial-place of Saint James was further from his native country than that of any other apostle; and those are styled "Romers" who go to Rome, whither those were bound whom in this sonnet I call Pilgrims. I do not divide this sonnet, its meaning being sufficiently obvious.

TELL me, ye pilgrims, who so thoughtful go,
Musing, mayhap, on what is far away,
Come ye from climes so far (as your array
And look of foreign nurture seem to show),
That from your eyes no tears of pity flow,
As ye along our mourning city stray,
Serene of countenance and free, as they
Who of her deep disaster nothing know.

But would ye stay and listen to her plaint,
Full surely in this heart of sighs I feel,
That all in tears you would pursue your course.
Oh, she hath lost her Beatrice,—her saint !
And what of her her co-mates can reveal,
Must drown with tears even strangers' hearts perforce.

After this I received a message from two ladies, requesting me to send these verses of mine to them ; and I, considering of what noble quality these ladies were, resolved to do so, and at the same time to compose something new to send along with the others, thereby the more honourably to fulfil their request. Thereupon I wrote a sonnet, descriptive of my state, and sent it to them together with that which has just been given, and with that other beginning—" *Come, oh ye gentle hearts,*" &c. The sonnet which I composed on this occasion begins—" *Beyond the sphere.*"

This sonnet has five parts. In the first I state whither my thought is going, naming it by the name of one of its effects; in the second I state why it mounts upwards, and who makes it do so; in the third I state what it sees, namely, a lady receiving adoration—and then I call it a pilgrim spirit, forasmuch as it ascends spiritually, and like a pilgrim who is away from his own country, and there abides; in the fourth I state how it sees her as she truly is; that is to say, in a state of exaltation which surpasses my comprehension; in other words, that my thought rises to a conception of her state, which my understanding cannot grasp;



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NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS



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"In that part of the book of my memory," p. 3.

THIS metaphor was a favourite one with Dante, and is characteristic of the intensity with which he both observed and felt. So in the canzone beginning,—*"E' m' incresce di me si malamente,"* he alludes again to the *"libro della mente"* (see *infra*, p. 106); and in the *"Inferno,"* ii. 8, he says,—*"O mente, che scriviesticio, ch' io vidi."*

"Oh mind, that all I saw has kept
Safe in a written record."—CARY.

Chaucer, in his *"Temple of Fame,"* adopts the same strain:—

"Oh thought, that writ all that I met,
And in the tresorie it set
Of my braine, now shall men see,
If any virtue in thee be."

The metaphor is a familiar one in our literature:

thus in "Hamlet,"—"The book and volume of my brain;" and in "Henry VI.," Part i. Act. ii. Sc. 4. Plantagenet says:—

"For your partaker Poole, and you yourself,
I'll note you *in my book of memory*,
To scourge you for this apprehension."

"*Nine times already, since my birth, had the Heaven,*"
&c., p. 3.

THE astronomy of Dante's age, following the Ptolemaic system, assumed nine heavens circling within and over each other, in the centre of which the earth rested immovable; these, again, were encircled by the empyrean, which was immovable, and formed the tenth and outermost heaven. The heaven of the sun, the fourth of the heavens which move in a circle round the earth, is that here alluded to. Buffal-macco, in one of the frescoes of the Campo Santo at Pisa, has represented the universe as composed of nine circles, according to the same theory, and supported by the hands of Christ, whose head is seen rising above the ninth circle.

"*Who was called Beatrice by many who wist not
wherefore she was so called,*" p. 3.

THE text of this passage is manifestly corrupt, and has puzzled the ingenuity of all the commentators. Fraticelli reads,—"*fu chiamata da molti Beatrice, i quali non sapeano che si chiamare;*" out of which it is not possible to extract any satisfactory meaning. Dante may have meant to say that she was unconsciously called Beatrice (that is, the Beatifier) by

many who did not know why they so called her. A slight alteration in the text would give this meaning, and it would not be out of harmony with Dante's modes of thought.

"The twelfth part of a degree," p. 3.

THE starry heavens, or the eighth of the nine heavens above mentioned, moved, according to the astronomy of Dante's time, from evening to morning one degree in a hundred years. Dante was born in 1265, and, the twelfth part of a degree being eight years and four months, he met with Beatrice for the first time in 1274, and, if Boccaccio's narrative be correct, on the 1st of May in that year.

"Her apparel was of a most noble colour, a subdued and becoming crimson," p. 4.

VESTITA *di nobilissimo colore umile ed onesto sanguigno.*" According to Villano, the Florentine ladies of this period considered themselves to be full dressed with a close gown of coarse scarlet cloth, fastened at the waist by a girdle of leather, and a fur mantle, the hood of which covered their heads; while the women of low degree wore a dress of the same shape, made of coarse green cambray. Dante seems, however, to imply by *nobilissimo colore* something more than the fact that her dress was that of a young lady of good family.

"At that moment the spirit of life," p. 4.

THE following note by Karl Förster ('Das Neue Leben, aus dem Italiänischen übersetzt und erläutert,' Leipzig, 1841, p. 109) is valuable in explanation of this and

other passages in which Dante employs the language of the scholastic philosophy:—"The philosophy of that period assumed, according to the precedent of Aristotle, the faculties of the soul to be threefold, and also three kinds of powers as lying at the bases of these, a natural or vegetative faculty (*potentia vegetativa*), a faculty of sensation (*potentia animalis*), and a faculty of life (*potentia vitalis*), each of which has its appointed seat and appropriate organs in the body. In connection with this stands the doctrine, which had passed from the Greek physicians and Arabian philosophers into the psychology of the time, of the *Spirits*, delicate filmy beings, to each of which its appointed seat in the body is assigned, in order therefrom to set into motion and activity the faculty which appertains to it. Of these spirits there are three sorts: (1.) the natural spirit (*spiritus naturalis*), which has its seat in the liver, and shows itself more especially active in the organs of digestion and evacuation; (2.) the animal or sensitive spirit (*spiritus animalis*), born in the heart, but to which the brain has been assigned as its abiding place, from which it radiates, like light, through the nerves, and by exciting them stimulates the faculties of sense and motion; (3.) the spirit of life (*spiritus vitalis*), begotten from the purest heart's blood, which conveys the glow of life through the other members, and gives them all the capabilities of action which emanate from vital heat. The arteries serve to transmit this spirit to all the members. Hear how Hugo of St Victor expresses himself to the same effect, in reference to the faculties of the soul:—"The natural power prepares within the liver the blood and other juices, which spread by means of the veins throughout the whole body. The vital power dwells

within the heart, and whilst, in order to mitigate its heat, it inhales and exhales the air, it communicates life and wellbeing to the whole body; for, by means of the arteries, it drives the blood, vivified by the pure air, through the whole body, and by the movements of the blood physicians recognise the regular or deficient action (*temperantiam atque intemperantiam*) of the heart. The animal power has its seat in the brain, from which it imparts life to the four senses, and stimulates the organs of speech into expression as well as the limbs to motion. There are, in fact, three brain-chambers; a front chamber, from which all sensation, a back one, from which all motion, and a third and intermediate one, from which the whole reasoning faculties emanate.'—'*Hugo a St Victore de Anima*,' l. ii. c. 13. Hugo was no stranger either to the doctrine of the *spirits*. What shape these ideas took among the later schoolmen, particularly with Thomas Aquinas, and through him in the mind of Dante, we see by the 16–18 cantos of the '*Purgatorio*.' The same views prevailed, with greater or less modifications, down to the sixteenth century."

In the fifth stanza of the canzone quoted below (p. 108), Dante speaks of his first meeting with Beatrice in almost the same language as in the text.

"*That saying of the poet Homer*," p. 5.

DANTE was ignorant of Greek, and quotes some Italian translation. A passage in Petrarch's Treatise, '*De Remediis utriusque Fortunæ*,' in which a similar citation is made, led Witte to discover the original in Homer—Ii. 24, 259 :

οὐδὲ ἐφ'κει

ἄνδρός γε θνητοῦ παῖς ἔμμεναι, ἀλλὰ θεοῖο.

*"When so many days had passed away as made up
the exact measure of nine years,"* p. 5.

DANTE had obviously no personal communication with Beatrice, although, as he says, he had seen her frequently during the nine years which elapsed after the time of their first meeting until now, when he was eighteen, and she seventeen years and four months old. Their second meeting seems to have taken place on the 1st of May 1283. To this second meeting Dante seems to allude in the sixth stanza of the canzone cited below (p. 108).

"To this sonnet I received replies from many," p. 8.

THREE of these have been preserved—by Guido Cavalcanti, by Cino da Pistoia, and by Dante da Majano. That by Guido Cavalcanti, which is the sonnet referred to by Dante in the text, is as follows:—

Vedesti al mio parere ogni valore.

THOU hast, I ween, beheld whate'er of bright,
Or great, or good a mortal vision may,
If thou hast in thee felt his sovereign might,
Who in the world of honour beareth sway:
All 'noyance dies, where beams his gracious sight,
Minds, sanctified by pity, him obey,
And on our sleep he pours such deep delight,
That, all unfelt, he bears our hearts away!
Your heart he bore away, for well he knew
That death full soon would call thy lady hence,
And, fearing this, he fed her with that heart.
When all in tears he seemed, and thus withdrew,
Sweet was thy sleep, but soon from thee to part,
For onward strode its foe, to scare it thence.

Cino da Pistoia offered an entirely different solution of the problem in the following lines :—

Naturalmente chere ogni amadore.

BY nature every lover yearns to lay
Bare to his ladye-love his heart of flame :
And by the vision, which before thee came,
This truth to thee Love purposed to display,
When in that humble and submissive way
He fed thy lady with thy burning heart,
Who from all pain and sorrow far apart,
In mantle wrapt, had slumbered many a day.
Joyous of cheer was Love, as he came on,
To give thee what thy heart so sighed to gain,
And blend two spirits in one mutual glow ;
And, knowing well Love's keen and ceaseless pain,
Which he within thy lady's heart had sown,
He wept for pity, as he turned to go.

Dante da Majano, who in these days would have been a worthy member of the "fast" school of writers, instead of taking Dante's passion *au sérieux*, banters him in the following coarse and clumsy lines, in which, after the fashion of his class, sheer brutality is presented in lieu of humour :—

Di cio che stato sei dimandatore.

AFTER much turning of the problem over,
Which you've propounded, briefly I reply,
Though in such matters little versed am I,
And what your vision means I thus uncover.
Have at its mystery, then, most doleful lover !
If you be hale in mind, in body stout,
With copious purge go wash your inwards out,
And scare the vapours that around you hover,

Making you babble such fantastic stuff ;
 But if you're really ill, then with your wit
 Something, depend on't, 's very much the matter.
 This is my written judgment :—*sap. verb. suff.* :
 Nor shall I alter it, not I, one whit,
 Till Dr Drench has diagnosed your water.

Dante, while he informs us that Guido Cavalcanti's interpretation of his dream was not the true one, adds, "*ma ora è manifesto alli più semplici.*" Whatever may have been the case when he wrote these words, no modern Œdipus has been found to explain its meaning. It is a pity Dante did not record it, as in doing so he might have thrown some light on the relation in which he stood to Beatrice. There appears to be a special significance in the lady's sleep, in its being broken by Love, and her eating the burning heart in fear,—

"d' esto cor ardendo
Lei paventosa umilmente pascea,"—

to which neither Guido Cavalcanti nor Cino da Pistoia advert. Some covert allusion may be intended to the fact, that Beatrice had been married or contracted to Messer Simone dei Bardi, before she knew of Dante's passion, or gave any countenance to it.

"He whom I call the foremost of my friends," p. 8.

THIS was "the young father of Italian song," Guido Cavalcanti, to whom allusion is made in the 'Vita Nuova' on several occasions, and at whose request, and for whom, in fact, it seems to have been written (see p. 66). Cavalcanti was considerably older than

Dante, and had already established a high reputation both as a philosopher and poet. Dino Compagni speaks of him as "a noble, courteous, and daring youth, but haughty and retired, and given to study." Boccaccio, who makes him the hero of one of his tales, describes him thus :—" Besides being one of the best logicians in the world, and an excellent natural philosopher, he was also very witty, had fine manners, and spoke much. Everything he did was done better than any one else could do it, and in a mode befitting a gentleman." Dante thought highly of his poetry. This is apparent both from his frequent commendation of him in the Treatise "De Vulgari Eloquentia," and from the allusion to him in the "Purgatorio," Canto xi., which Dante puts into the mouth of their friend Oderigi :—

*" Credette Cimabue nella pittura
Tener lo campo: ed ora ha Giotto il grido,
Sì che la fama di colui oscura.
Così ha tolto l' uno all' altro Guido
La gloria della lingua: e forse è nato,
Chi l' uno e l' altro caccera di nido."*

" Cimabue thought
To lord it over painting's field; but now
The cry is Giotto's, and his name eclipsed.
Thus hath one Guido from the other snatched
The lettered prize; and he, perhaps, is born
Who shall drive either from their nest."—CARY.

The other Guido is Guido Guinicelli, a Bolognese poet, who died in 1287, and who was regarded by Dante as his master in the art of writing love poetry.
—Purg. xxvi. 96 :

*"Tal mi fec' io, ma non a tanto insurgo,
Quando i' udì nomar se stesso il padre—
Mio, e dagli altri miei miglior, che mai
Rime d' amore usar dolci e leggiadre."*

"Such my joy,
Save that I more repressed it, when I heard
From his own lips the name of him pronounced,
Who was a father to me, and to those
My betters, who have ever used the sweet
And pleasant rhymes of love."—CARY.

Cary gives specimens, with translations, of both the Guidos in the notes to the "Purgatorio," Canto xi. The poetry of Guido di Cavalcanti seems to have formed a model for much of the minor poetry of Dante. Like his, it is often pedantic and obscure; but flashes of a noble fervour constantly break through it. The following translation may afford some idea of his more impassioned style:—

Chi è questa che vien ch' ogni uom la mira?

WHAT'S she, whose coming rivets all men's eyes;
Who makes the air to tremble with delight,
And thrills so every heart, that no man might
Find tongue for words, but vents his soul in sighs?
Ah God! the ecstasy her gaze to 'bide!
Say to her, Love, how great I ne'er may tell!
Yet with her such humility doth dwell,
The gentlest maid seems scornful by her side.
Ne'er may the charms that compass her be told,
For all best virtues unto her incline,
And Beauty shows her for her goddess-queen:
Nor can our souls attain such heights serene,
Nor are they stirred by yearnings so divine,
That we can half her peerless worth behold.

"It chanced upon a day that this most gracious creature," p. 9.

THROUGHOUT the 'Vita Nuova' Dante applies one epithet to Beatrice,—she is either *questa gentilissima*, or *questa gentilissima donna*: for which "most gentle being," or "most gentle lady," as gentle was used in our early literature, when "the grand old name of gentleman" had still a significance, would be a fair equivalent. Our language unfortunately has no other to express that combination of dignity with sweetness, of strength with tenderness, of self-respect with respect for others, which makes courtesy instinctive, and lifts those with whom it comes in contact into a higher and purer moral atmosphere. There is a lingering sweetness in the Italian which harmonises admirably with the image which Dante's account of Beatrice calls up of grace, sweetness, and dignity, coupled with a certain delicacy of organisation. Our word "lady" is the nearest approach to what is implied in the words "*gentilissima donna*;" but it no longer suggests to the general reader those qualities which alone it ought to be reserved to express.

"Thereupon it flashed upon me to make of this lady a screen for the truth," p. 9.

It has been argued, from the fact of Dante having resorted to this artifice to conceal the object of his love, that Beatrice was married at the time. This, however, by no means follows. It is of the nature of all deep and reverential passion to cherish its own secret, and Dante was just the man to carry this instinct to excess; moreover, it is not conceivable that Dante, in whose love reverence had so large

a part, would have yearned for Beatrice with such passionate desire, as we see from the earlier poems of the 'Vita Nuova' that he manifestly did, had she been at that time the wife of another. It is strange, certainly, that he should through such a device have been able to keep his own counsel, as he says, for months and years. But, however blind others may have been to his attachment, Beatrice apparently was not, for he himself states (p. 19), when speaking of her indignation at him for compromising, as she had been led to believe, the reputation of the second lady, whom he had used as a screen, that his secret "had through long usage in some measure become known to her" (*conosciuto per lei alquanto lo tuo segreto per lunga consuetudine*). Such secret attachments are quickly divined by their objects; and the very indignation which Beatrice is stated to have felt, and which led her to withhold her salutation from her lover, seems to indicate that Dante's secret worship had not been ungrateful to her. Had she been married at this time, to have given it even such distant encouragement as she appears to have done would have been the very wantonness of cruelty.

But we get, from some collateral circumstances, an indication that at this time Beatrice was not married. Thus Dante (p. 10) mentions that during the time when this lady was the screen of his love he composed a *serventese*, in which her name was recorded along with those of fifty-nine of the most beautiful ladies of Florence. To this *serventese* an allusion occurs in the following sonnet by Dante to his friend Cavalcanti, where Beatrice is mentioned in a way which most assuredly she never would have been had she been married at the time. Instead of Shelley's

well-known version of this sonnet, we borrow, with some slight alterations, one which appeared in an article on " Tuscan Proverbs," in ' Fraser's Magazine ' for January 1857 :—

Guido, vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io.

GUIDO, I wish that Lapo, thou, and I
 Were borne away by some sweet wizardrie,
 And set on board a bark that o'er the sea
 In any wind at our free-will should fly !
 Then no mischance, nor any churlish weather
 Should hurt or hinder as we sailed away,
 But longings not to part would grow and stay,
 Through always living in one mind together.
 And might the gracious wizard bring us there
 Thy Vanna, Bicé, and our Lapo's queen,
 Whose number on my roll is twice fifteen,
 Then, ever rapt in love-discourses rare,
 Each of the damosels would feel content,
 As *we* should, I am very confident.

Vanna was Giovanna, the lady-love of Guido Cavalcanti, and a friend of Beatrice, whom we find associated with her in a subsequent part of the ' Vita Nuova ' (p. 49, 50). The Lapo here alluded to was Lapo Gianni, whose mistress's name, according to Fraticelli, was Monna Lagia, and whose name had, by the necessities of the rhyme, stood the thirtieth on the roll of ladies' names in the *serventese*, as, no doubt from the same cause, Beatrice's had stood the ninth. Had any obstacle so substantial as a husband stood between Dante and the accomplishment of the wish expressed in this sonnet, one cannot think it would have been written.

It has been contended that the love which Dante

began with feigning for the ladies who acted as his screens, he ended with feeling (see, for example, 'Dante Alighieri, Sein Leben und Seine Werke,' von Hartwig Floto (Stuttgart, 1858), p. 27). This conclusion seems, however, to be without warrant; it is directly at variance with what Dante himself says; it is inconsistent with his appeal to Beatrice in the canzone (p. 19) beginning—" *My song, I'd have you find out Love;*" and, what is still more conclusive, it is discountenanced by the passages in the "Purgatorio," Canto xxx., cited in the Introduction (p. xxxviii-xl), where Beatrice rebukes Dante for his falling away after her death, and, indeed, when well advanced in life, but allows him the praise of a perfectly pure and constant devotion during the period of his "New Life."

" *A few days after the death of this lady I had occasion to quit the aforesaid city,*" p. 14.

It has been conjectured, by the commentators, that Dante alludes here to the time when he went to Bologna to prosecute his studies there. The following sonnet appears to belong to the same period; it scarcely reaches the strain of profound grief which marks the poems written after Beatrice's death, with which some of the commentators would class it:—

Se'l bel aspetto non mi fosse tolto.

IF I from her dear presence were not torn,
Whom to behold unceasingly I pine,
For whose fair visage, hidden from mine eyne,
Here far away with tears and sighs I mourn,
Then would the grief, by which I'm racked and worn
With pangs so cruel, that this life of mine

I live like one that doth to death decline,
 And of all hope is utterly forlorn,
 So lightly press me, it could scarce annoy :
 But my heart throbs with anguish day and night,
 Since I may look upon her face no more,
 And so bereft am I of every joy,
 That things which give to other men delight,
 To me a burden are, and fret me sore.

The following canzone also seems to refer to the same period of absence from Florence, and the vicinity of his mistress :—

La dispietata mente, che pur mira.

THE sad self-torturing mind, that backward turns
 My gaze upon a time gone past recall,
 On one hand siege against my heart doth wage ;
 While the fond passion of my soul, that yearns
 To that fair land, which I have left, with all
 The force of Love doth on the other rage.
 Nor do I feel its strength so great, as may
 'Gainst such assault its footing long defend,
 Gentle Madonna, if unhelpt by you.
 Wherefore, if not undue
 It seem, that you relief to it should lend,
 Vouchsafe to send your dear salute to me,
 That strengthened so its drooping powers may be.

The heart, dear lady, which so loves you, deign
 To cheer in this its dire extremity,
 For succour it may hope from you alone.
 The generous master never checks the rein,
 When summoned to his vassal's aid ; for he
 In this shields not *his* honour, but his own :
 And my heart's anguish wilder makes my moan,
 When I reflect that in its very core
 You by Love's hand are limned, dear lady mine ;

Wherefore should you incline
To comfort and to cherish it the more,
Since He, from whom flows all that's good and fair,
Holds us more dear, that we His image bear.

But should you bid me, oh my sweetest hope,
Wait yet awhile the boon I thus implore,
Know, I can brook no further tarrying :
My power to bear has reached its utmost scope.
This must you know, when nought is left me more,
Save to my last and dearest hope to cling ;
For all the burdens fate on him can fling,
Even though they press to death, a man should bear,
Ere unto proof he put his chiefest friend,
Not knowing what the end ;
And if, perchance, that friend should slight his prayer,
Thing there is not that costs so dear, I ween,
Or that with death is fraught so swift and keen.

And surely you are she I love the best,
And who can give the dearest boon to me,
And rests on whom my chiefest hope withal.
I prize not life, save but to do your hest,
And whatsoever may to your honour be
I seek, while all things else my spirit gall ;
What others dare not give, you may ; for all
The power of "yes" and "no" hath Love to you
Intrusted, and I draw my comfort thence ;
And that such confidence
I have, is to your gracious bearing due,
For all that look on you from such outside
Must know that pity doth within abide.

Then send your dear salute, withheld so long,
To soothe the heart that watches for it so,
And for it, lady, makes this plaintive call.
But know, across that heart a barrier strong
Is set, even that same shaft, which from his bow

Love sped the day when I became his thrall ;
 And so admission is denied to all,
 Save to Love's messengers, who, by his will
 That keeps it closed, the passage can unbar ;
 Wherefore in this my war
 Its coming possibly might work me ill,
 If it should come, and unattended by
 The envoys of that lord, whose liege am I.

Brief should thy journey be, my song, and swift,
 For well thou knowest how near his end must be,
 Who sends thee forth upon this embassy.

*" And whoso had wished to see and know Love had
 only to look upon the tremor of my eyes,"* p. 17.

" Rapture, trembling through my eyes,
 Reveals how much I love her."

—HAMILTON OF BANGOUR.

*" Relying on this person, who had led his friend unto
 the very verge of death,"* p. 23.

IN the original—" *Fidandomi nella persona, la quale
 un suo amico all' estremità della vita condotto avea.*"
 This passage is full of difficulty. On a careful review
 of this part of the narrative, it seems to me this was the
 first time that Dante met Beatrice after her marriage
 with Messer Simone dei Bardi. The shock was un-
 expected, and so severe as to have been nearly fatal to
 him. See Dante's reply to his friend's inquiry, as he
 led him away:—" I have set my foot in that part of
 life, to pass beyond which with purpose to return is
 impossible ;" which is saying in other words that he
 had been *condotto all' estremità della vita*. Taking
 this view, the passage should be translated thus :—

"Relying on this person, who had (unwittingly) led his friend to the very gates of death."

But why, it may be said, assume that this was a meeting after Beatrice's marriage, or, if so, that it was the first? It is quite true, Dante says nothing which expressly supports either assumption, and indeed he nowhere indicates in any way the fact that Beatrice ever was married. But her presence at a festival of the kind here referred to is in itself evidence that she was married, as it was not the custom for any but married women to attend on brides (Cesare Balbo, '*Vita di Dante*,' Cap. III.) It has even been conjectured, that the incident occurred at Beatrice's own bridal feast. This, however, is clearly out of the question, and for reasons which are at once obvious. But Dante might very well have gone with a friend to a wedding-party, where neither his friend nor himself expected Beatrice to be present, and might have lost his self-command on suddenly finding himself face to face with her for the first time after her marriage. It is only upon the supposition that some very special reason for his emotion had arisen that we can account for its having gone so far as to endanger his life. I seem to trace a change from this point in the character of the poems in the '*Vita Nuova*,' as if the lover's lingering hope had given place for a time to despair. Dante's love for Beatrice was so real, so full of passion, so intensely personal, that to have seen her wedded to another must have gone near to killing him. Had she at any time fed him with hopes? There are lines in these and in other poems of Dante's, written apparently about the same period, which seem to breathe the bitterness of a man who had some cause for complaint on this score. Or had he, with the

wilful self-deception of the lover, misinterpreted as special regard what was mere general courtesy? At all events it was manifestly long before Dante became reconciled to the event, which, however, he would appear in some measure to have been, when he wrote the canzone, *Donne, che avete intelletto d'amore* (p. 32), and the two exquisite sonnets which immediately follow (p. 37, 38). The last of these we know for certain was written after Beatrice had been for some time married, as Dante states (p. 39) that it was written not many days before her father's death (31st December 1289); and in her father's will, which is dated 15th January 1287, she is mentioned as having been at that time the wife of Simone dei Bardi—*Item Dominæ Bici filiæ suæ et uxori Domini Simonis de Bardis reliquit libr. 50. ad floren.* Contrasting these sonnets with those beginning—"All angry murmurs die within my breast," p. 27, and, "Full many a time I ponder on the drear," p. 29, it is not difficult to imagine the long and terrible struggle which Dante must have gone through before he reached the sad serenity of reverential homage into which his passion has there become sublimated. It is to this period of fiery conflict between admiration and despair that I should be disposed to assign the following sonnets, the somewhat wayward and querulous tone of which may have made Dante exclude them from the 'Vita Nuova,' written when, perhaps, he knew more of the true state of Beatrice's feelings towards himself during this time of anguish; and when, at all events, through her death, she had become for him "a thing enskied and sainted," with whose memory all the turbulence of his earthly passion would have seemed to jar:—

Dagli occhi della mia donna si muove.

FROM the fair palace of my lady's eyes
 There beams a light so noble, that, where'er
 She shows herself, are seen such wonders rare,
 And high, as awe men into mute surprise;
 And from their rays upon my heart doth rain
 Such fear, that I as with a palsy shake.
 "Here will I come no more!" I say, but make
 All my resolvèd vows, alas! in vain.
 Still do I turn where I am still subdued,
 Giving new courage to my fearful eyes,
 That whilom shrank before a blaze so great.
 I see her, and they sink, together glued,
 And the desire that led my footsteps dies;
 Then, Love, do thou take order for my state.

Io maledico il dì ch' io vidi in prima.

CURST be the day when first I saw the beams
 That in those eyes of thine, fair traitor, play;
 Curst be the hour thou didst the fortress climb
 Of my lulled heart, to steal my soul away;
 Curst be the labour of my love's fond dreams,
 The burning thoughts inwoven in many a lay,
 Which I have clothed in fancy's brightest gleams,
 To make thee famous to all after-time!
 And oh! accurst my stubborn memory,
 Clinging to that which slays me hour by hour,
 Thy lovely form, whence love full oft is found
 Launching his perjuries with malicious power,
 Till all men make a mock of him and me,
 That think of fortune's wheel to stay the giddy round.

Io son sì vago della bella luce.

So charmed am I with the bewitching light
 Of the false traitor-eyes that me have slain,

That I return again and yet again,
 To meet new death, and fresh envenomed flight;
 And their sweet radiance dazzles so my sight,
 That I am all bewildered, heart and brain,
 And leaving reason, virtue, then am fain
 Desire alone to follow as I might.
 So sweetly wrapt in trustfulness serene,
 To winning death he leads my steps along,
 Nor breaks the dream till I am stricken through;
 Then deeply I lament the scornful wrong,
 But more I grieve, alas! that Pity's seen
 In me defrauded of her guerdon true.

Poiche sguardando, il cor feriste in tanto.

OH Love, since, whilst I gazed, you struck a blow
 Right to my heart, that thrills each nerve with pain,
 In mercy grant some balm to ease my bane,
 And let my wearied soul some comfort know;
 Dost thou not see these eyes that waste away
 In tears for those dire pangs, which day and night
 To death are leading me, with grasp so tight,
 Escape I may not, strive howe'er I may?
 See, lady, see, how true the grief I bear,
 And how my voice is hollow, thin, and worn,
 With calling still on thee to 'bate thy scorn:
 Yet if it be thy will, oh lady sweet,
 That I should perish in my heart's despair,
 Here will I die contented at thy feet.

To the same period also may probably be ascribed the following canzone. The remarkable coincidence of the allusions in stanzas five and six with the circumstantial narrative in the 'Vita Nuova' of the poet's first and second meetings with Beatrice, seems to make it all but certain that she is the object of this canzone. Undoubtedly a tone of reproachfulness runs through

it, quite unlike anything in the 'Vita Nuova,' as though she had led him on to love her, and then trifled with his passion; but who shall answer for the wilfulness or injustice of a man so deeply in love as Dante? It must always be remembered that the 'Vita Nuova' was composed when his mind had run itself clear of all its turbid emotions. Doubtless, too, he had before her death come to a full understanding with Beatrice, and knew how innocent she was of blame towards him. He was not likely, therefore, to include this canzone in the record of his love-story; but it is not, therefore, the less interesting, as enabling us to "read between the lines" of the 'Vita Nuova,' and to mark the fierce pulsations of the passion which was there to assume a character so lofty and almost sacred.

E' m' increse di me si malamente.

My grief has brought me to such rueful pass,
That my self-pity quite
As keenly wounds as what provokes my sighs;
For to my bitter cost I feel, alas!
That in mine own despite
The breath of my last sigh begins to rise
Within the heart was pierced by those fair eyes,
What time Love's hands unveiled to me their light,
To lure me on to direful overthrow.
Ah me, how soft and bright,
Ah me, how tender-sweet on me they shone,
When first they ushered on
The death that racks me now with many a throe,
Saying, "We carry peace where'er we go!"

"Peace to your heart we'll give, and joy to you!"
Thus many and many a day
Unto mine eyes those of yon lady said.

But when, by prompting of her thought, they knew
That by her tyrant sway
My soul into captivity was led,
Then with Love's banners far away they fled,
Nor from that hour have I beheld them gleam
With victory elate ;
And so in grief supreme
My soul is left, where most it hoped for ease,
And now nigh-dead it sees
The heart with which it was incorporate,
And, sick with love, must leave its whilom mate.

Sick, sick with love, and sad with many a tear,
Forth from this life it wends,
Disconsolate that Love forbids its stay ;
And, as it goes, so piteous is its cheer,
That its Creator bends
An ear of pity to its doleful lay.
In the heart's core it rallies, as it may,
With what small spark of life still lingers there ;
Till of the soul it shall be quite forlorn,
And wails in its despair,
That Love should it from this world's confine chase ;
And many a sad embrace
It gives the spirits, who unceasing mourn,
That they must be from their companion torn.

Still sits that lady's image in my thought,
Enthroned triumphant there,
Where it by Love, her guide, was set erewhile ;
Nor recks she of the mischief she has wrought,
But fairer and more fair
She grows, and still more joyous is her smile ;
Her eyes she lifts, that murderously beguile,
And calls to that which grieves it must be gone :
" Hence ! get thee hence for ever, caitiff vile !"
So that belovèd one,

Still, will as ever, to assuage me pain :
 But less is now my pain,
 For now my sense grows duller to its throes,
 And nearer is the term of all my woes.

The day that first to earth this lady came,
 As in the book is writ
 Of memory, which grows fainter day by day,
 A passion new shot like a fever-fit
 Through all my boyish frame,
 Which left me wan and shivering with dismay,
 And on my every nerve a curb did lay
 So suddenly, that down to earth I fell,
 Pierced by a voice that to my heart did cleave,
 And, as that book doth tell,
 Such tremors shook the master-spirit's breath,
 It seemed, full surely, death
 Had come to bear him hence ; but now, believe,
 He who was cause of all for this doth grieve.

When later I beheld that form and face,
 That make me so lament,
 Ladies, to whom this story I indite,
 The faculty that holds the noblest place,*
 Gazing with joy intent,
 Felt its malignant star had risen to sight,
 And by that gaze of wonder and delight
 It knew what wild desire had there been bred ;
 Then to its mates it muttered, all in tears,
 " Hither will come, instead
 Of her of yore, that form full fair to see,
 Which thrills me now with fears,
 And of us all shall sovran lady be,
 Soon as her eyes assert their empery."

* *Quella virtù che ha più nobilitate.* The understanding
 or intellectual faculty is meant.

Ladies, to you have I addressed my song,
 You, whose young eyes with beauty's lustre shine,
 Whose pensive spirits are by Love subdued,
 That these poor words of mine
 May find some grace wherever they may hie ;
 And here, before you, I
 Forgive that beauteous thing the ruthless mood,
 That me her vassal hath to death pursued.

" *They are the same, Love and the gentle heart !
 So runs the saw, which from the sage I stole,*" p. 37.

THE allusion here is to the canzone by Guido Guin-
 celli, beginning,—

" *Al cor gentil ripara sempre amore.*"

" Love finds a refuge in the gentle heart."

A translation of the whole canzone will be found in
 the notes to 'The Lyrical Poems of Dante Alighieri,'
 translated by Charles Lyell (London, 1845), p. 125.

"Sage" is used on several occasions by Dante as a
 convertible term for poet ; as, for example, in the "Con-
 vito," tr. iv. cap. 13, he introduces a reference to Juve-
 nal's line, "*Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator,*"
 with the words "*E però dice il Savio.*"

" *Love hath his throne within my lady's eyes,*" p. 38.

THE following sonnet bears internal evidence of hav-
 ing reference to Beatrice, and was probably written
 about the same time as the sonnet in the text :—

Di donne io vedi una gentile schiera.

LAST All Saint's Day it was my chance to meet
 Of damosels a bevy passing fair,
 And one advanced as she their leader were,
 Who on her right hand Love beside her led.

Lo, from her eyes a glorious light she shed,
 That seemed as 'twere a spirit all of fire,
 And gazing unabashed, as she drew nigher,
 In her I saw an angel form complete!
 To all might worthily such grace receive
 A calm sweet greeting from her eyes she sent,
 That filled with noble ardour every breast;
 From heaven that sovran lady, I believe,
 For our salvation here to earth was sent.
 How, then, is she who walks beside her blest!

"Not many days after this sonnet was written,"

&c., p. 39.

FOLCO PORTINARI, the father of Beatrice, died on the 31st December 1289.

"And as it is the usage of the aforesaid city at these woeful seasons, that women with women," &c., p. 40.

THE Author of 'A Comment on the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri' (London, Murray, 1822), in reference to the custom here alluded to, says:—
 "This, I suppose, was once the general fashion throughout Europe; since I have found it still established in all its primitive rigour in Portugal, the country to which many usages of our ancestors seem to have retreated for final refuge. This is a very dreary one; and probably even still more annoying to those who are oppressed with real grief, than to those whom decency obliges to feign it. Every evening, for an entire month of 1814, a young and handsome widow of Oporto presided at the upper end of a long room, with a single small veiled lamp on a table before her, while downward from her arm-chair extended two

parallel rows of seats for the company. These, both on entering and retiring, made a silent bow; nor spoke a syllable during the visit. The ladies occupied the chairs on the right, the gentlemen those on the left. All were in deep mourning, as well as the fair mistress, who occasionally applied a handkerchief to her eyes; although doubts were entertained as to her sincerity. But melancholy beyond description was another mourning scene of which I was witness in the same city—a mother bereft of her only son. She was an Englishwoman married to a Portuguese; yet was she obliged to undergo that cruel ceremony, although her husband had considerably sought to avoid it, by conveying her immediately to the country, and remaining there above six months. On the very evening following her return, carriages assembling at her door, she was necessitated to conform to the custom, and have her sorrow intruded on and anew worked up by that funeral pomp, for thirty successive nights; while such was the shattered state of her nerves, that it was surprising she did not fall a victim to her repeated struggles with that frenzy of affliction which it is horrible to feel, but still more horrible to endeavour to control, as she was forced to do." Besides the sonnet in the text (p. 38), Dante appears to have written another upon the same occasion, scarcely less beautiful, and which presents a picture even more vivid of Beatrice's distress.

Voi, donne, che pietoso atto mostrate.

YE ladies, that so piteous are of mien,
What's she who lies in such abyss of woe?
Can it be she, who of my heart is queen?
Oh! do not hide the truth if this be so!

So altered are her beauteous lineaments,
 So wasted is her form, that she, I wis,
 That heavenly paragon no more presents,
 Who on her co-mates shed reflex of bliss.
 If thou our lady canst not recognise,
 Who is so sunk, I do not deem it strange,
 Since I scarce knew what still I most adore;
 But closer look, and by her gracious eyes
 Thou'lt know her; in their sweetness is no change:
 Already thou art shent, then weep no more.

In the eighth line of this sonnet Dante refers to the effect which association with Beatrice had upon other ladies, as more fully described in the sonnet (p. 56) beginning, "He fully sees her matchless worth, who sees."

"A little cloudlet they before them bear," p. 48.

AMONG Dante's minor poems is found a beautiful little ballata, in which Beatrice seems to be apostrophised under the same metaphor. It was probably written after the vision recorded in the text.

Deh nuvoletta, che in ombra d' Amore.

AH, beauteous cloudlet, that before mine eyes
 So suddenly in Love's own semblance came,
 Have pity on the heart that feels thy blame,
 That hopes in thee, and in desiring dies!
 Cloudlet, of form than aught of earth more fair,
 By thy discourse that is too fatal-sweet,
 Thou sett'st my heart on fire;
 Then by thy smile thou dost my spirit cheat
 Into forgetfulness of its despair
 With hope and fond desire.

Chide not the boldness which can thus aspire,
 But rather view me worn with love so great;
 For many a maid relenting all too late
 Has felt the pangs that caused her lover's sighs.

*"And on her face was perfect calm expressed,
 That seemed as though it said, 'I am at rest!'"* p. 48.

COMPARE with this Petrarch's description of Laura,
 as she lay dead:—

*"Pallida no, ma più che neve bianca;
 Pareva posar come persona stanca,"* &c.

"Not pale, but whiter than the snow; she lay
 Like one unto her rest fatigued away.
 It seemed as though her spirit, ere it fled,
 Upon her sweet and gracious eyes had shed
 A gentle slumber, a peculiar grace,—
 Death showed so lovely in her lovely face."

"Quomodo sedet sola civitas," p. 58.

THE quotation is from Lamentations, cap. i. v. 1; Dante also commences his letter to the cardinals (Ep. IX.) with the same words, applying them to the condition of Rome without a Pope. This coincidence has not been overlooked by the allegorisers of the 'Vita Nuova.'

It might have been supposed, from the narrative in the text, that the death of Beatrice had come upon Dante unexpectedly, and while he was still meditating his plaintive appeals for her favour. This, however, we must conclude not to have been the case, if we are to accept as authentic the following canzone, which is found among his minor poems, and which, if there be

any weight in internal evidence, must be ascribed to him, and must have been written while her life still hung in the balance. Only inferior in power to the magnificent dirge in which Dante records her death (p. 62 *et seq.*), it seems to be the very voice of a breaking heart, passionately imploring that the blow may be averted, which a dreadful foreboding assures it must inevitably fall.

Morte, poich' io non trovo a cui mi doglia.

OH Death, since no man listens to my cries,
Nor gives one pitying sigh, when I complain,
Where'er I go, where'er I turn mine eyes ;
And since all courage thou from me hast ta'en,
And clothest me, as in a robe, with pain,
And on me turn'st all shocks of dire mischance ;
Since all my life within thy danger lies,
To make it, at thy pleasure, poor or rich ;
'Tis meet, I turn to thee my countenance,
That as a corpse is woeful-wan of hue.
To thee, as one that is compassionate,
I come, oh Death, wailing that peace, of which
Thou spoilest me, if thou her life undo,
Who in her keeping holds my heart and fate,
And is of all that's good the very gate !

Oh Death, how dear that peace thou'dst take from me,
Which stirs me now to thee to make my moan,
I will not speak, for thou thyself canst see !
Look but on these sad eyes, bedimmed with tears,
Or on the anguish that in them is shown,
Or on the signs that mark me for thine own.
Alas ! if the mere turmoil of my fears
Have dashed me so, how shall I writhe and groan,
If quenched I see the light of those sweet eyes,
That unto mine as lodestars wont to be !

The sharpest stroke of fate were less severe
 Than is the dread that thus in anguish cries,*
 Even now so keen my pangs, I greatly fear
 That I shall long, to 'scape a heavier woe,
 To die, yet find no hand to strike the blow.

Oh Death, if thou that gentle creature slay,
 On whose high worth, consummate and complete
 With all that's fair, our wondering spirits gaze,
 From earth thou drivest virtue in dismay,
 Tak'st from pure grace its mansion and retreat,
 Spoil'st her high influence of its meed and praise,
 Blightest her gracious beauty, that as far
 All other beauty in its sheen outvies,
 As fits a creature culled and charged to bear
 The light of heaven to gladden mortal eyes;
 The goodly faith thou dost for ever mar
 Of that true Love, which guideth all her ways!
 If thou, oh Death, shalt quench her light so rare,
 Then, then may love through all his empire say,
 "My brightest banner I have lost for aye!"

* In these two lines I follow the reading quoted by Witte
 ('Ammerkungen' Dante Alighieri's *Lyrische Gedichte*' (Leipzig, 1842), vol. ii. p. 47), on the authority of an old manuscript:—

"Credo che qual si sia, quel che più noi,
 Sentirà dolce verso il mio lamento."

This seems more in accordance with the rest of the strophe
 than Fraticelli's text:—

"Ben veggio che 'l mio fin consenti e vuoi;
 Sentirai dolce sotto il mio lamento."

"That thou wilt joy to see me sped, is clear,
 And music sweet to thee will be my sighs."

If this were so, why does Dante appeal to Death at all,
come a persona pia?

Oh Death, repent thee, then, of all the woe,
That surely must ensue if she shall die,
Woe heavier far than ever yet befell ;
Relax the string upon thy bended bow,
That it make not the murderous arrow fly,
Which thou hast levelled at her heart too well !
Oh, mercy, for God's love ! some pause allow !
Curb yet a little while the purpose fell,
That yearns to strike her down, whom with such rare
Excelling graces God hath dowered ! Ah me !
If thou knowest mercy, Death, approve it now !
Methinks even now heaven opens, and I see
The angels of the Lord descend to bear
That sainted soul aloft, where now on high
His praise is sung in anthems through the sky.

My song, thou seest how slender is and frail
The thread on which hangs all my hope, and how
Without this lady's aid I faint and fail ;
Then hie thee with thy plain and humble tale,
My little song, nor linger by the way ;
And, with the meekness that invests thee, bow
Before great Death, oh thou, my last-born lay !
So, breaking through the gates of cruelty,
The blessed fruit of mercy thou may'st gain ;
And if his purpose fell, perchance, by thee
Be shaken, to our lady bear amain
The tidings which her spirit comfort may,
And to the world the glorious boon recall
Of that fair soul, which is my all in all.

We are not surprised to be told that the shock of Beatrice's death nearly killed Dante. "What with weeping and anguish," says Boccaccio, "and total disregard of his personal appearance, he became like

some savage thing ; his cheeks haggard, his beard neglected, and his whole aspect transformed from what it used to be ; a spectacle of misery that moved the compassion of strangers as well as friends." In this picture we see Dante, like the Lady Constance, bearing a spirit unwillingly detained in its prison-house of clay :—

" Look, who comes here ! A grave unto a soul,
Holding the eternal spirit 'gainst its will
In the vile prison of the afflicted breath."

" *That year of our Lord in which the perfect number was nine times completed, within that century wherein she was born into the world,*" p. 59.

THE perfect number is ten (*Decas perfectissimus numerus est.*—'Macrobii' Comm. in Somn. Scip.' l. i. cap. 6). The day Beatrice died was, therefore, according to the indications of the text, the 9th of June 1290, only five months and a few days after her father's death.

" *After this canzone was written there came to me one, who, according to the degrees of friendship, was my friend next in order after my first,*" p. 65.

FLORO, in his life of Dante, says that the person here alluded to was unquestionably Beatrice's husband. He does not, however, explain how he gets over Dante's own statement that he was "connected by the nearest ties of blood" (*distretto di sanguinità*) with Beatrice. Surely this can point only to a brother.

"I lifted my eyes to see if I was observed, and beheld a lady at a window," p. 69.

AS Beatrice has been explained away into a mere ideal being, it was only natural that this lady should have shared a similar fortune. The critics who have fallen into this strain of allegorising have neither read Dante nor human nature. What can be more natural, what, at the same time, more profoundly sad, than the story of this "*donna consolatrice*," as here told by Dante? Who has not in some such wise been, at one time or another, reminded how faint, how evanescent are our deepest loves, our wildest griefs? Dante recurs to the subject in his "Convito," Tratt. ii. cap. 2, giving, in his mystical way, the very date at which he first encountered the lady in question.

"The star of Venus," he says, "had twice revolved within that orbit which causes it to appear at two different times as the morning and evening star, after the departure of that sainted Beatrice, who now dwells in heaven with the angels, and on earth within my soul, when that lady, of whom I made mention in the close of the 'Vita Nuova,' first appeared to my eyes, attended by Love, and took up a place within my mind. And, as it has been explained by me in the aforesaid little book, it befell, rather through her nobleness than through my choice, that I was inclined to become her lover; for she showed herself so deeply smitten with compassion for my widowed life, that the spirits of my eyes became most amicably disposed towards her, and I yielded without resistance to the agreeable influence of her person. But inasmuch as love does not spring up suddenly, and wax, and reach perfection, but demands a certain time

withal and nourishment by thinking, especially where adverse thoughts already exist to impede its influence, it follows that, before this new love could be perfected, there should needs be much conflict between the thoughts which fed, and those which resisted it, and which, on behalf of that glorious Beatrice, still held the citadel of my mind!"

It is quite true that in the passage immediately to be cited from the same treatise, Dante says that it was philosophy, and no creature of flesh and blood, that wooed him out of the depths of his affliction; and that, in accordance with the normal working of his mind, which instinctively gave palpable form and definite outline to all his conceptions, he pictured his comforter in the similitude of a woman. Those, however, who are familiar with Dante's modes of thinking and feeling, will see no incompatibility between the two statements. The two processes were possibly going on at the same time within him; the lady alluded to in the text insensibly stealing into "his study of imagination," and into a heart that in its very desolation must have yearned for sympathy, while philosophy was drawing his mind away from the monotonous and miserable reveries of grief. The first consolation he tells us, in unmistakable terms, that he renounced; to the second, that of "divine philosophy," he says, with equal clearness in the following passage, he clung, and found it full of healing:—

"I say, that when I lost the chief joy of my soul I fell into such an abyss of grief, that no consolation availed to cheer me. Nevertheless, after a time, my mind, which struggled to recover its health, resolved (since neither myself nor others could bring me comfort) to have recourse to the mode of consolation

which had been adopted by others in their despair. So I set myself to read that book by Boethius, which is but little known, in which, when wretched and in prison, he had worked out his consolation. And hearing, moreover, that Tullius had written another book, in which, while discoursing of friendship, he had lighted on words wherewith he consoled Lælius, a man of the highest worth, for the death of his friend Scipio, I set myself to read that also. And albeit at first I found it hard to fathom their meaning, at last I penetrated into it as far as what skill in grammar I had, and some little of my native intelligence, enabled me to go; by means of which latter I had already descried many things, as in a dream, as may be seen in the 'Vita Nuova.' And as commonly happens when the man who goes out to seek for silver stumbles upon gold, which, for some hidden reason, not, mayhap, without the divine command, is thrown in his way; so I, in my search for consolation, found not only a remedy for my tears, but words of authors, and of sciences and books to boot; the consideration whereof led me to the conviction that philosophy, who was the mistress of these authors, of these sciences, and of these books, must be a sovereign thing. And I pictured her to my imagination in the similitude of a lady; and I could not imagine her under any other aspect than one of pitying sympathy, wherefore I contemplated her so eagerly, and with so intense a feeling of reality, that I could scarce withdraw my gaze from her. And thenceforth I began to repair where she was truly to be seen—that is, in the schools of the churchmen, and at the disputations of the schoolmen; so that in a little time, some thirty months or so, I began to feel all her charms so strongly, that love for

her put to rout and destroyed all other thoughts."—"Convito," Tratt. II. xiii. p. 160.

Taking the view above expressed of the passage in the text, I do not agree with the opinion, advanced by some critics, that the lady who thus stole for a time into Dante's affections was Gemma Donati, whom he afterwards married. I do not think any allusion to her would have been in harmony with the purpose of the 'Vita Nuova;' his regard for her, and her relation to him, were things that ran in lines which never crossed or interwove themselves with his spiritual affiance to Beatrice.

We know nothing concerning Dante's marriage beyond the fact, that, during the few years his adverse fortunes permitted him to remain with Gemma Donati, she bore him six, if not seven, children, one of them, the youngest, a Beatrice, whom Boccaccio saw as a nun at Ravenna. And yet, because she did not live with him after his banishment from Florence, it has been assumed that their union was ill assorted! But who, that considers Dante's circumstances,—driven about as he was from place to place, dependent now upon this prince, now upon that, and at times without the bare means of subsistence,—will not find in these facts enough to account for their separation? She had her home in Florence, where her kinsmen were in the ascendant; and there she was able to bring up their numerous family upon the wreck which she had saved from her husband's estate. How much better this than to have increased his troubles by following him with her children into exile! The hope of being able to return to Florence probably never died within the poet's breast; and knowing the depth of love and tenderness that were in his nature, are we to assume

that the woman who gave herself to him, in the full knowledge that she was not the bride of his imagination, was not regarded by him with the esteem which her devotion was calculated to inspire? A marriage of reciprocal love it certainly was not, in the first instance; but Dante had a chivalrous tenderness of heart, and could not be insensible to the affection of a generous and devoted woman. There is not, moreover, one particle of evidence that the same generosity and affection which originally attracted Gemma Donati towards him were not continued to the last. If evidence were wanted how thoroughly they understood each other, it is given in the fact of their youngest child receiving the name of the ever-worshipped Beatrice. Surely we may read in this her intelligent and generous appreciation of the feeling which she knew well burned in her husband's heart for her to whom his earliest love was given, and who was to the last the muse of his genius.

That Dante, during his years of separation, was seduced by the attractions of at least one other woman, Gentucca of Lucca, and perhaps another, is apparently certain; but that he was, as Boccaccio says, both in youth and mature age given to wantonness (*Tra cotanta virtù, tra cotanta scienza, trovò amplissimo luogo la lussuria, e non solamente ne' giovani anni ma ancor ne' maturi*), may be discarded from our belief, with the many other unfounded anecdotes which that pleasant, but too credulous, chronicler has admitted into his biography. Dante was too little tolerant even of fickleness of fancy to be the slave of his senses. See how he rebukes his friend Cino di Pistoja for such weakness in the following sonnet:—

Io mi credea del tutto esser partito.

FRIEND Cino, I believed your rhymes and I
 Had fairly shaken hands to meet no more;
 Since it were meet, my bark, now far from shore,
 Ploughed other seas, beneath another sky.
 But, as a gudgeon caught by any fly,
 Fresh charms, I hear, you with each moon adore;
 So to the measures that they loved of yore,
 I will this once my wearied fingers ply.
 He that, like you, is sighing, suing still,
 Letting, now here, now there, his fancy stray,
 Him Cupid with his shafts but slightly grazes:
 If your heart bends to every woman's will,
 For God's sake, presently correct it, pray,
 So may your acts accord with your fine phrases.

Selvaggia dei Vergiolesi, Cino's mistress, to whom much of his poetry is addressed, died young. His sonnet on visiting her tomb is full of feeling:—

Io fu' in sul alto e in sul beato monte.

UP to yon high and blessed peak I went,
 There kissed the sacred stone on bended knee,
 And on the rock I fell, ah, woe is me!
 Where that beloved head was lowly bent.
 There was the fount of every virtue pent,
 That heavy day when death so ruthlessly
 Smote down the lady of my heart, ah me!
 In whom with beauty truth and grace were blent.
 Then unto Love in my despair I said,
 "Oh, my sweet God, do thou with death prevail,
 To take me where with her my heart doth lie!"
 But as my lord was deaf unto my cry,
 I turned and called "Selvaggia!" as I fled
 Along the mountains, with a cry of wail.

"After this time of trouble, and in the days when much people were on their way to view that blessed semblance of Himself," p. 77.

THE historian Villani mentions that at the time of the jubilee in Rome, in 1300, the handkerchief of Saint Veronica was exhibited in St Peter's Church, "for the consolation of Christian pilgrims, every Friday and saint's day," and that a great multitude, men and women, flocked to Rome, from far and near, for the purpose of seeing it. It has been conjectured that Dante alludes to this circumstance in the text, and that we may therefore assign to 1300 the completion of the 'Vita Nuova.' This seems in every way probable. It is quite clear, from the language in which it concludes, that Dante had made some progress with the composition of the 'Divina Commedia,' the period of which is placed by him in that year. In all likelihood, too, Dante modified some of the poems in the 'Vita Nuova,' to make them harmonise with the conception of Beatrice as embodied in his great poem; see, in particular, the second and third stanzas of the canzone beginning, "Ladies, who in Love's lore are deeply read," (p. 32), which can scarcely be supposed to have been originally written in the form in which we now see them. Like Goethe's autobiography, the 'Vita Nuova' is *Dichtung und Wahrheit*—essential fact shown in the transfiguring light of memory and imagination—a narrative of events recorded when time had shown how much of their import was transitory, how much enduring. Regarding this treatise, which he obviously did, as a prelude to the 'Divina Commedia,' Dante had no hesitation in ignoring mere questions of time, or in adapting to the

feeling then dominant within him portions of the poems to which Beatrice, while yet on earth, had given the motive.

As no unfit conclusion to these notes, I append a translation of a poem by Uhland, in which he has, with his usual grace and tenderness, embodied a summary of the theme to which this volume is devoted.

•

DANTE.

WAS it from a gate of Florence,
Or from heaven's own portal fair,
Yon blithe throng at morning issued,
In the sparkling spring-tide air ?

Children fair as meek-eyed angels,
Garlands in their locks entwined,
Down into the flowery valley,
Singing, dancing, gaily wind.

'Neath a laurel stood young Dante,
Thrilling to the heart to see,
In the fairest of those damsels,
Her who should his angel be.

Rustling in the spring's light breezes,
Stirred not every leaf above ?
Dante's young soul, did it thrill not
To the mastering touch of love ?

Yes ! the stream of song for ever
Filled his bosom from that day ;
Love, young love, inspired each measure,
Love and his resistless sway.

When again he saw that maiden,
 Blooming in her beauty's spring,
His poetic might had ripened
 Into stately blossoming.

Comes from forth the gate of Florence
 Once again a thronging train,
Slowly now and full of sadness,
 To a dull funereal strain.

'Neath yon inky pall, inwoven
 With a snow-white cross, they bear,
In her prime too early gathered,
 Beatrice, the young, the fair.

In his chamber lone sat Dante—
 Shades of evening filled the place—
Heard afar the death-bell booming,
 Heard and covered up his face.

To the forest-gloom he wandered,
 Where its shadows thickest fell ;
From that hour his measures sounded
 Like the distant passing bell.

But in his worst desolation,
 When in moody grief he strayed,
Came to him a blessed spirit
 From his own departed maid.

One that by the hand did guide him
 Through the fiercest fires of bale,
Where his earthly pangs grew silent,
 Seeing damnèd spirits quail.

On his murky path advancing,
 Soon the glad light met his eyes ;

And his love was there to greet him
At the gate of Paradise.

High and higher still they mounted
Through the glories of the sky,
She the sun of suns intently
Viewing with undazzled eye.

He his gaze still sideways turning
To his loved companion's face,
Which reflected back the radiance
Of that ever-glorious place.

All that story he hath woven
In a lay of heavenly pride,
Lasting as the scars by lightning
Graven upon the mountain's side.

Yes ! Full worthy to be honoured
'Mongst all bards as THE DIVINE,
Dante, who his earthly passion
Did to heavenly love refine.



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